

FYODOR MIKHAILOVICH DOSTOYEVSKY
THE GAMBLER
(From a Young Man's Notes)

CHAPTER I

I 'VE FINALLY COME BACK from my two-week absence. Our people have already been in Roulettenburg for three days. I thought they would be waiting for me God knows how eagerly, but I was mistaken. The general had an extremely independent look, spoke to me condescendingly, and sent me to his sister. It was clear they had got hold of money somewhere. It even seemed to me that the general was a little ashamed to look at me. Marya Filippovna was extremely busy and scarcely spoke with me; she took the money, however, counted it, and listened to my whole report. Mezentsov, the little Frenchman, and some Englishman or other were expected for dinner; as usual, when there's money, then at once it's a formal dinner; Moscow-style. Polina Alexandrovna, seeing me, asked what had taken me so long, and went off somewhere without waiting for an answer. Of course, she did it on purpose. We must have a talk, however. A lot has accumulated.

I've been assigned a small room on the fourth floor of the hotel. It's known here that I belong to *the general's suite*. By all appearances, they've managed to make themselves known. The general is regarded by everyone here as a very rich Russian grandee. Before dinner he managed, among other errands, to give me two thousand-franc notes to have changed. I changed them in the hotel office. Now they'll look at us as millionaires for at least a whole week. I was about to take Misha and Nadya for a walk, but on the stairs I was summoned to the general; he had seen fit to inquire where I was going to take them. The man is decidedly unable to look me straight in the eye; he would very much like to, but I respond each time with such an intent—that is, irreverent—gaze, that he seems disconcerted. In a highly pompous speech, piling one phrase on another and finally becoming totally confused, he gave me to understand that I should stroll with the children somewhere in the park, a good distance from the vauxhall.¹ He finally became quite angry and added abruptly: "Or else you might just take them to the vauxhall, to the roulette tables. Excuse me," he added, "but I know you're still rather light-minded and perhaps capable of gambling. In any case, though I am not your mentor, and have no wish to take that role upon myself, I do at any rate have the right to wish that you not, so to speak, compromise me..."

"But I don't even have any money," I said calmly. "To lose it, you have to have it."
"You shall have it at once," the general replied, blushing slightly. He rummaged in his desk, consulted a ledger, and it turned out that he owed me about a hundred and twenty roubles.

"How are we going to reckon it up?" he began. "It has to be converted into thalers. Here, take a hundred thalers, a round figure—the rest, of course, won't get lost."

I silently took the money.

"Please don't be offended by my words, you're so touchy...If I made that observation, it was, so to speak, to warn you, and, of course, I have a certain right to do so..."

Coming back home with the children before dinner, I met a whole cavalcade. Our people had gone to have a look at some ruins. Two excellent carriages, magnificent horses! Mlle Blanche in the same carriage with Marya Filippovna and Polina; the little Frenchman, the Englishman, and the general on horseback. Passersby stopped and looked; an effect was produced; only it won't come to any good for the general. I calculated that with the four thousand francs I had brought, plus whatever they had evidently managed to get hold of here, they now had seven or eight thousand francs. That is too little for Mlle Blanche.

Mlle Blanche is also staying in our hotel, along with her mother; our little Frenchman is here somewhere as well. The servants call him "M. le comte," Mlle Blanche's mother is called "Mme la comtesse"; well, maybe they really are comte and comtesse.²

I just knew that M. le comte would not recognize me when we gathered for dinner. The general, of course, did not even think of introducing us or of presenting me to him; and M. le comte himself has visited Russia and knows what small fry an *outchitel*³—as they call it—is there. He knows me very well, however. But, I must confess, I appeared at dinner uninvited; it seems the general forgot to give orders, otherwise he would surely have sent me to eat at the *table d'hôte*.⁴ I appeared on my own, so that the general looked at me with displeasure. Kindly Marya Filippovna showed me to a place at once; but my having met Mr. Astley helped me, and willy-nilly I wound up making part of their company.

I first met this strange Englishman in Prussia, on a train where we sat opposite each other, when I was catching up with our people; then I ran into him on entering France, and finally in Switzerland; twice in the course of these two weeks—and now I suddenly met him in Roulettenburg. Never in my life have I met a shyer man; he's shy to the point of stupidity, and, of course, he knows it himself, because he's not at all stupid. However, he's very nice and quiet. I got him to talk at our first meeting in Prussia. He announced to me that he had been at Nordkap that summer, and that he would like very much to go to the Nizhny Novgorod fair. I don't know how he became acquainted with the general; I believe he's boundlessly in love with Polina. When she came in, he flushed a flaming crimson. He was very glad that I sat down beside him at the table, and it seems he considers me a bosom friend.

At table the Frenchman set the tone extraordinarily; he was careless and pompous with everyone. And in Moscow, I remember, he just blew soap bubbles. He talked terribly much about finance and Russian politics. The general sometimes ventured to contradict—but modestly, only enough so as not to definitively damage his own importance.

I was in a strange state of mind. Of course, before dinner was half-through, I managed to ask myself my customary and habitual question: "How come I hang around with this general and didn't leave them long, long ago?" Now and then I glanced at Polina Alexandrovna; she ignored me completely. It ended with me getting angry and deciding to be rude.

It began with me suddenly, for no rhyme or reason, interfering in their conversation, loudly and without being asked. Above all, I wanted to quarrel with the little Frenchman. I turned to the general and suddenly, quite loudly and distinctly, and, it seems, interrupting him, observed that in hotels this summer it was almost impossible for Russians to dine at the *table d'hôte*. The general shot me an

astonished glance.

"If you're a self-respecting man," I let myself go on, "you will unavoidably invite abuse and will have to put up with being exceedingly slighted. In Paris, on the Rhine, even in Switzerland, there are so many little Poles and sympathizing little Frenchmen at the *table d'hôte* that it's impossible to utter a word, if you happen to be a Russian."

I said it in French. The general looked at me in perplexity, not knowing whether he should get angry or merely be astonished that I had forgotten myself so.

"That means that somebody somewhere has taught you a lesson," the little Frenchman said carelessly and contemptuously.

"In Paris I began by quarreling with a Pole," I replied, "then with a French officer who supported the Pole. And then some of the Frenchmen took my side, when I told them how I wanted to spit in the monseigneur's coffee."

"Spit?" the general asked with pompous perplexity, and even looked around. The little Frenchman studied me mistrustfully.

"Just so, sir," I replied. "Since I was convinced for a whole two days that I might have to go to Rome briefly to take care of our business, I went to the office of the Holy Father's embassy in Paris to get a visa in my passport. ² There I was met by a little abbé, about fifty years old, dry and with frost in his physiognomy, who, having heard me out politely, but extremely dryly, asked me to wait. Though I was in a hurry, I did sit down, of course, took out *L'Opinion nationale*, ³ and began reading some terrible abuse of Russia. Meanwhile, I heard someone go through the next room to see monseigneur; I saw my abbé bow to him. I addressed him with my former request; again, still more dryly, he asked me to wait. A little later another stranger came, but on business—some Austrian. He was listened to and at once taken upstairs. Then I became extremely vexed. I stood up, went over to the abbé, and told him resolutely that since monseigneur was receiving, he could finish with me as well. The abbé suddenly drew back from me in extraordinary surprise. It was simply incomprehensible to him how a Russian nonentity dared to put himself on a par with monseigneur's visitors. In the most insolent tone, as if glad that he could insult me, he looked me up and down and cried: 'Can you possibly think that Monseigneur would interrupt his coffee for you?' Then I, too, cried, but still louder than he: 'Let it be known to you that I spit on your monseigneur's coffee! If you do not finish with my passport this very minute, I'll go to him myself.'

"What! Just when the cardinal is sitting with him!" the abbé cried, recoiling from me in horror, rushed to the door, and spread his arms crosswise, showing that he would sooner die than let me pass.

"Then I answered him that I was a heretic and a barbarian, '*que je suis hérétique et barbare*,' and that to me all these archbishops, cardinals, monseigneurs, etc., etc.—were all the same. In short, I showed him that I would not leave off. The abbé gave me a look of boundless spite, then snatched my passport and took it upstairs. A minute later it had a visa in it. Here, sirs, would you care to have a look?" I took out the passport and showed the Roman visa.

"Really, though," the general began...

"What saved you was calling yourself a barbarian and a heretic," the little Frenchman observed, grinning. "*Cela n'était pas si bête*."

⁴ "What, should I look to our Russians? They sit here, don't dare peep, and are ready, perhaps, to renounce the fact that they're Russians. At any rate in my hotel in Paris they began to treat me with much greater attention when I told everybody about my fight with the abbé. The fat Polish *pan*, ⁵ the man most hostile to me at the *table d'hôte*, faded into the background. The Frenchmen even put up with it when I told them that about two years ago I saw a man whom a French *chasseur* had shot in the year twelve ⁶—simply so as to fire off his gun. The man was a ten-year-old child then, and his family hadn't managed to leave Moscow."

"That cannot be," the little Frenchman seethed, "a French soldier would not shoot a child!"

"Yet so it was," I replied. "It was told to me by a respectable retired captain, and I myself saw the scar from the bullet on his cheek."

The Frenchman began talking much and quickly. The general tried to support him, but I recommended that he read, for instance, bits from the *Notes* of General Perovsky, ⁷ who was taken prisoner by the French in the year twelve. Finally, Marya Filippovna started talking about something, so as to disrupt the discussion. The general was very displeased with me, because the Frenchman and I had almost begun to shout. But it seemed that Mr. Astley liked my argument with the Frenchman very much; getting up from the table, he suggested that he and I drink a glass of wine. In the evening, I duly managed to have a fifteen-minute talk with Polina Alexandrovna. Our talk took place during a stroll. Everybody went to the park near the *vauxhall*. Polina sat down on a bench opposite the fountain and sent Nadenka to play not far away with some children. I also let Misha play by the fountain, and we were finally alone.

At first we began, naturally, with business. Polina simply became angry when I gave her only seven hundred guldens in all. She was sure I'd bring her from Paris, in pawn for her diamonds, at least two thousand guldens or even more.

"I need money at all costs," she said, "and I must get it; otherwise I'm simply lost."

I started asking about what had happened in my absence.

"Nothing, except that we received two pieces of news from Petersburg, first, that grandmother was very unwell, and, two days later, that it seemed she had died. This was news from Timofei Petrovich," Polina added, "and he's a precise man. We're waiting for the final, definitive news."

"So everyone here is in expectation?" I asked.

"Of course: everyone and everything; for the whole six months that's the only thing they've hoped for."

"And you're hoping, too?" I asked.

"Why, I'm not related to her at all, I'm only the general's stepdaughter. But I know for certain that she'll remember me in her will."

"It seems to me you'll get a lot," I said affirmatively.

"Yes, she loved me; but why does it seem so to you?"

"Tell me," I answered with a question, "our marquis, it seems, is also initiated into all the family secrets?"

"And why are you interested in that?" asked Polina, giving me a stern and dry look.

"Why not? If I'm not mistaken, the general has already managed to borrow money from him."

"You've guessed quite correctly."

"Well, would he lend him money if he didn't know about grandma? Did you notice, at dinner: three times or so, speaking about grandmother, he called her 'grandma'—'*la baboulinka*.' Such close and friendly relations!"

"Yes, you're right. As soon as he learns that I'm also getting something in the will, he'll immediately propose to me. Is that what you wanted to find out?"

"Only then? I thought he proposed a long time ago."

"You know perfectly well he hasn't!" Polina said testily. "Where did you meet this Englishman?" she asked after a moment's silence.

"I just knew you'd ask about him right away."

I told her about my previous meetings with Mr. Astley during my trip. "He's shy and amorous and, of course, already in love with you?"

"Yes, he's in love with me," Polina replied.

"And he's certainly ten times richer than the Frenchman. What, does the Frenchman really have anything? Isn't that open to doubt?"

"No, it's not. He has some sort of château. The general told me that yesterday. Well, so, is that enough for you?"

"In your place, I'd certainly marry the Englishman."

"Why?" asked Polina.

"The Frenchman's handsomer, but he's meaner; and the Englishman, on top of being honest, is also ten times richer," I snapped.

"Yes, but then the Frenchman is a marquis and more intelligent," she replied with the greatest possible equanimity.

"Is that true?" I went on in the same way.

"Perfectly."

Polina terribly disliked my questions, and I saw that she wanted to make me angry with her tone and the wildness of her answer. I told her so at once.

"Why, it does indeed amuse me to see you in a fury. You ought to pay for the fact alone that I allow you to put such questions and make such surmises."

"I do indeed consider it my right to put all sorts of questions to you," I replied calmly, "precisely because I'm prepared to pay for them however you like, and my own life I now count for nothing."

Polina burst out laughing:

"Last time, on the Schlangenberg, you told me you were ready at my first word to throw yourself down headfirst, and I believe it's a thousand-foot drop. One day I'll speak that word, solely to see how you're going to pay, and you may be sure I'll stand firm. You are hateful to me—precisely because I've allowed you so much, and more hateful still, because I need you so much. But for the time being I do need you—I must take good care of you."

She went to get up. She had spoken with irritation. Lately she has always finished a conversation with me with spite and irritation, with real spite.

"Allow me to ask you, what is this Mlle Blanche?" I asked, not wanting to let her go without an explanation.

"You know yourself what Mlle Blanche is. Nothing more has been added. Mlle Blanche will probably become Madame la Générale—naturally, if the rumor of grandmother's death is confirmed, because Mlle Blanche, and her mother, and her second cousin, the marquis, all know very well that we are ruined."

"And the general is definitively in love?"

"That's not the point now. Listen and remember: take these seven hundred florins and go gambling, win me as much as you can at roulette; I need money now at all costs."

Having said this, she called Nadenka and went to the vauxhall, where she joined our whole company. I, however, turned into the first path to the left, pondering and astonished. It was as if I'd been hit on the head, after the order to go and play roulette. Strange thing: I had enough to ponder, and yet I immersed myself wholly in an analysis of my feelings for Polina. Really, it had been easier for me during those two weeks of absence than now, on the day of my return, though on the way I had longed for her like a madman, had thrashed about like a man in a frenzy, and even in sleep had seen her before me every moment. Once (this was in Switzerland), I had fallen asleep on the train, and it seems I began talking aloud with Polina, which made all my fellow travelers laugh. And now once more I asked myself the question: do I love her? And once more I was unable to answer it, that is, better to say, I answered myself again, for the hundredth time, that I hated her. Yes, she was hateful to me. There were moments (and precisely each time at the end of our conversations) when I would have given half my life to strangle her! I swear, if it had been possible to sink a sharp knife slowly into her breast, it seems to me I'd have snatched at it with delight. And yet, I swear by all that's holy, if on the Schlangenberg, on the fashionable *point*,⁴⁷ she had actually said to me: "Throw yourself down," I would have thrown myself down at once, and even with delight. I knew that. One way or another this has to be resolved. She understands all this astonishingly well, and the thought that I have a fully correct and distinct awareness of all her inaccessibility to me, all the impossibility of the fulfillment of my fantasies—this thought, I'm sure, affords her extraordinary pleasure; otherwise how could someone so prudent and intelligent be on such intimate and frank terms with me? It seems to me that she has looked at me so far like that ancient empress who began to undress in front of her slave, not regarding him as a human being. Yes, many times she has not regarded me as a human being...

However, I had her commission—to win at roulette at all costs. There was no time to reflect on why and how soon I had to win, and what new considerations had been born in that eternally calculating head. Besides, during these two weeks, evidently, no end of new facts had accrued, of which I still had no idea. All this had to be figured out, it all had to be grasped, and as soon as possible. But meanwhile now there was no time: I had to go to the roulette table.

CHAPTER II

I CONFESS, THIS WAS unpleasant for me. Though I had decided that I would play, it was not at all my intention to begin by playing for others. It even threw me off somewhat, and I went into the gaming rooms with a most vexatious feeling. At first sight, I disliked everything there. I can't stand this lackeyishness in the gossip columns of the whole world, and mainly in our Russian newspapers, where almost every spring our columnists tell about two things: first, the extraordinary magnificence and splendor of the gaming rooms in the roulette towns on the Rhine, and second, the heaps of gold that supposedly lie on the tables. They're not paid for that; they simply do it out of disinterested obsequiousness. There is no magnificence in these trashy rooms, and as for the gold, not only are there no heaps on the tables, but there's scarcely even the slightest trace. Of course, now and then during the season some odd duck suddenly turns up, an Englishman, or some sort of Asiatic, a Turk, as happened this summer, and suddenly loses or wins a great deal; the rest all play for small change, and, on the average, there's usually very little money lying on the table. As I had only just entered the gaming room (for the first time in my life), I did not venture to play for a while. Besides, it was crowded. But if I had been alone, even then I think I would sooner have left than started playing. I confess, my heart was pounding, and I was not coolheaded; I knew for certain and had long resolved that I would not leave Roulettenburg just so; something radical and definitive was bound to happen in my fate. So it must be, and so it would be. Ridiculous as it is that I should expect to get so much from roulette, it seems to me that the routine opinion, accepted by all, that it is stupid and absurd to expect anything at all from gambling, is even more ridiculous. Why is gambling worse than any other way of making money—trade, for instance? It's true that only one in a hundred wins. But what do I care about that?

In any case, I decided to look on at first and not start anything serious that evening. That evening, if something did happen, it would be accidental and slight—and that's what I settled on. Besides, I had to study the game itself; because, despite the thousands of descriptions of roulette I had always read with such avidity, I understood decidedly nothing of how it worked until I saw it myself.

First, it all seemed so filthy to me—somehow morally nasty and filthy. I am by no means speaking of those greedy and restless faces that stand in dozens, even in hundreds, around the gaming tables. I see decidedly nothing filthy in the desire to win sooner and more; I have always found very stupid the thought of one well-nourished and prosperous moralist, who, in response to someone's excuse that "they play for low stakes," replied: so much the worse, because there's little interest. As if little interest and big interest were not the same. It's a matter of proportion. What's small for Rothschild, is great wealth for me, and as for gains and winnings—people everywhere, not only at the roulette table, do nothing but gain or win something from each other. Whether gain and profit are vile in themselves—is another question. But I won't decide it here. Since I myself was possessed in the highest degree by a desire to win, all this interest and all this interested filth, if you wish, was for me, as I entered the room, somehow the more helpful, the more congenial. It's really nice when people don't stand on ceremony, but act in an open and unbuttoned way with each other. And why should one deceive oneself? It's the most futile and ill-calculated occupation! Especially unattractive, at first sight, in all this roulette riffraff was the respect for what they were doing, the grave and even deferential way they all stood around the tables. That's why there is a sharp distinction here between the kind of gambling known as *mauvais genre*²⁸ and the kind permissible to a respectable man. There are two sorts of gambling—one gentlemanly, the other plebeian, mercenary, a gambling for all kinds of riffraff. Here they are strictly distinguished, and in essence how mean that distinction is! A gentleman, for instance, may stake five or ten louis d'or, rarely more; however, he may also stake a thousand francs, if he's very rich, but only for the game itself, only for amusement, only to watch the process of winning or losing; but by no means should he be interested in the actual winnings. Having won, he may, for instance, laugh aloud, make a remark to someone around him, he may even stake again and double it again, but solely out of curiosity, to observe the chances, to calculate, and not out of a plebeian desire to win. In short, he should look at all these gaming tables, roulette wheels, and *trente et quarante*²⁹ not otherwise than as an amusement set up solely for his pleasure. He should not even suspect the interests and traps on which the bank is founded and set up. It would even be far from a bad thing if, for instance, he fancied that all these other gamblers, all this trash that trembles over every gulden, were just as rich and gentlemanly as he is, and gambled solely for diversion and amusement. This total ignorance of reality and innocent view of people would, of course, be extremely aristocratic. I saw how many mamas pushed forward innocent and graceful young ladies of fifteen and sixteen, their daughters, and, giving them a few gold coins, taught them how to play. The young lady would win or lose, unfailingly smile, and go away very pleased. Our general approached the table solidly and pompously; an attendant rushed to offer him a chair, but he ignored the attendant; he spent a very long time taking out his purse, spent a very long time taking three hundred francs in gold from the purse, staked them on black, and won. He didn't pick up his winnings but left them on the table. It came up black again; he didn't take them this time either, and when the third time it came up red, he lost twelve hundred francs at one go. He walked away with a smile and controlling his temper. I'm convinced there was a gnawing in his heart, and had the stake been two or three times bigger, he would have lost control and shown his emotion. However, in my presence a Frenchman won and then lost as much as thirty thousand francs gaily and without any emotion. A true gentleman, even if he loses his entire fortune, must not show emotion. Money should be so far beneath the gentlemanly condition that it is almost not worth worrying about. Of course, it would be highly aristocratic to pay absolutely no attention to all the filth of all this riffraff and all the surroundings. However, sometimes the reverse method is no less aristocratic: to notice, that is, to observe, even to scrutinize, for instance, through a lorgnette, all this riffraff; but not otherwise than taking all this crowd and all this filth as its own sort of diversion, as a performance set up for gentlemanly amusement. You can knock about in this crowd yourself, but look around with the perfect conviction that you are in fact an observer and by no means make up one of its components. However, you oughtn't to observe too closely: again that would not be gentlemanly, because in any case the spectacle isn't worth too great or close an inspection.

And in general, few spectacles are worth too close an inspection by a gentleman. And yet to me personally it seemed that all this was very much worth quite a close inspection, especially for someone who did not come only to observe, but sincerely and conscientiously counted himself among all this riffraff. As for my innermost moral convictions, in my present reflections there is, of course, no place for them. Let it be so; I say it to clear my conscience. But I will note this: that all this time recently, it has been terribly disgusting for me to match my acts and thoughts to any moral standard. Something else has guided me...

The riffraff do indeed play very filthily. I'm even not averse to the thought that a lot of the most common thievery goes on here at the table. The croupiers who sit at the ends of the table, look after the stakes, and make the payments, have a terrible amount of work. There's more riffraff for you! For the most part they're Frenchmen. However, I'm observing and making remarks here not at all in order to describe roulette; I'm attuning myself, in order to know how to behave in the future. I noticed, for instance, that there was nothing more ordinary than for someone's hand suddenly to reach out from behind the table and take what you've won. An argument begins, there's often shouting, and—I humbly ask you to prove, to find witnesses, that the stake is yours!

At first this was all Chinese to me; I only guessed and figured out somehow that one can stake on numbers, odds and evens, and colors. That evening I decided to try a hundred guildens of Polina Alexandrovna's money. The thought that I was setting out to play for someone else somehow threw me off. The sensation was extremely unpleasant, and I wanted to be done with it quickly. I kept fancying that by starting out for Polina I was undermining my own luck. Is it really impossible to touch a gaming table without being infected at once with superstition? I began by taking out five friedrichs d'or, that is, fifty guildens, and staking them on evens. The wheel spun and it came up thirteen—I lost. With some morbid feeling, solely to be done with it somehow and leave, I staked another five friedrichs d'or on red. It came up red. I staked all ten friedrichs d'or—again it came up red. I again staked it all at once, and again it came up red. I took the forty friedrichs d'or and staked twenty on the twelve middle numbers, not knowing what would come of it. I was paid triple. Thus, from ten friedrichs d'or, I had suddenly acquired eighty. Some extraordinary and strange sensation made it so unbearable for me that I decided to leave. It seemed to me that I would play quite differently if I were playing for myself. Nevertheless, I staked all eighty friedrichs d'or once more on evens. This time it came up four; they poured out another eighty friedrichs d'or for me, and, taking the whole heap of a hundred and sixty friedrichs d'or, I went to look for Polina Alexandrovna.

They had all gone for a stroll somewhere in the park, and I managed to see her only at supper. This time the Frenchman wasn't there, and the general made a display of himself; among other things, he found it necessary to observe to me again that he did not wish to see me at the gaming table. In his opinion, it would be very compromising for him if I somehow lost too much; "but even if you were to win a lot, then, too, I would be compromised," he added significantly. "Of course, I have no right to control your actions, but you must agree..." Here, as usual, he didn't finish. I answered dryly that I had very little money and that, consequently, I could not lose too conspicuously, even if I should gamble. On the way to my room upstairs, I managed to hand Polina her winnings and declared to her that I would not play for her another time.

"Why not?" she asked anxiously.

"Because I want to play for myself," I replied, studying her with astonishment, "and this hampers me."

"So you resolutely go on being convinced that roulette is your salvation and your only way out?" she asked mockingly. I answered again very seriously that, yes; that as for my absolute assurance of winning, let it be ridiculous, I agree, "so long as I'm left alone."

Polina Alexandrovna insisted that I absolutely must share today's winnings half and half with her, and wanted to give me eighty friedrichs d'or, suggesting that we go on playing in the future on that condition. I refused the half resolutely and definitively, and declared that I could not play for others, not because I didn't want to, but because I was sure to lose.

"However, I myself, stupid as it may be, also hope almost only in roulette," she said pensively. "And therefore you absolutely must go on playing half and half with me, and—of course—you will." Here she left me, not listening to my further objections.

CHAPTER III

HOWEVER, FOR THE whole day yesterday she didn't say a word to me about gambling. And she generally avoided talking with me yesterday. Her earlier manner with me did not change. The same complete carelessness of attitude when we met, and even something scornful and hateful. Generally she doesn't wish to conceal her loathing for me; I can see that. In spite of that, she also doesn't conceal from me that she needs me for something and is saving me for something. Some sort of strange relations have been established between us, in many ways incomprehensible to me—considering her pride and arrogance with everyone. She knows, for instance, that I love her madly, she even allows me to speak of my passion—and, of course, she could in no way express her scorn of me more fully than by this permission to speak to her of my love unhindered and uncensored. “Meaning,” so to say, “I hold your feelings of so little account that it is decidedly all the same to me what you speak to me about and what you feel for me.” Of her own affairs she talked a lot with me before as well, but she was never fully candid. What's more, there were the following subtleties in her disregard for me: she knows, let's say, that I'm aware of some circumstance of her life or of something that troubles her greatly; she will even tell me something of her circumstances herself, if she needs to use me somehow for her own purposes, like a slave, or for running errands; but she will always tell me exactly as much as someone needs to know who is used for running errands, and—if the whole sequence of events is still unknown to me, if she sees herself how I suffer and worry over her sufferings and worries, she will never deign to set me fully at ease by friendly candor, though, as she often employed me on not only troublesome but even dangerous errands, she was obliged, in my opinion, to be candid with me. And was it worth caring about my feelings, about the fact that I also worried, and maybe cared and suffered three times more over her cares and misfortunes than she did herself?

Three weeks ago I already knew of her intention to play roulette. She even warned me that I was to play in her place, because it was indecent for her to play. By the tone of her words I noticed then that she had some serious concern, and not merely a wish to win money. What was money in itself to her! There's a goal here, some circumstance that I may guess at, but that I don't yet know. Of course, the humiliation and slavery in which she holds me could give me (quite often do give me) the possibility of questioning her crudely and directly. Since I'm a slave to her and all too insignificant in her eyes, there is no point in her being offended at my crude curiosity. But the thing is that, while she allows me to ask questions, she doesn't answer them. Sometimes she doesn't notice them at all. That's how it is with us!

Yesterday there was a lot of talk among us about a telegram sent to Petersburg four days ago and to which there has been no reply. The general is visibly worried and pensive. It has to do, of course, with grandmother. The Frenchman is worried as well. Yesterday, for instance, they had a long and serious talk after dinner. The Frenchman's tone with us all was extraordinarily arrogant and careless. Precisely as in the proverb: invite a pig to the table and he'll put his feet on it. Even with Polina he was careless to the point of rudeness; however, he enjoys taking part in general strolls in the vauhall or in cavalcades and drives out of town. I have long been informed of some of the circumstances binding the Frenchman and the general: in Russia they were going to start a factory together; I don't know whether their project has fallen through or they're still talking about it. Besides that, I chanced to learn part of a family secret: the Frenchman actually helped the general out last year and gave him thirty thousand to make up a deficit in government funds as he handed over his post. And so, of course, the general is in his clutches; but now, right now, the main role in all this is being played all the same by Mlle Blanche, and in that I'm sure I'm not mistaken.

Who is Mlle Blanche? Among us here they say she's a French noblewoman, who goes around with her mother and has a colossal fortune. It is also known that she is some sort of relation of our marquis, only a very distant one, some sort of cousin or second cousin. They say that before my trip to Paris, contacts between the Frenchman and Mlle Blanche were somehow much more ceremonious, they seemed to be on a much more refined and delicate footing; while now their acquaintance, friendship, and family connection have emerged as somehow more coarse, more intimate. Maybe our situation seems so bad to them that they no longer find it necessary to be too ceremonious with us and to hide things. I noticed two days ago how Mr. Astley was studying Mlle Blanche and her mother. It seemed to me that he knew them. It even seemed to me that our Frenchman had met Mr. Astley previously as well. However, Mr. Astley is so shy, prudish, and reserved that one can virtually count on him—he won't wash any dirty linen in public. The Frenchman, at any rate, barely greets him and almost doesn't look at him; which means he's not afraid of him. That's understandable; but why is it that Mlle Blanche almost doesn't look at him either? The more so as yesterday the marquis let something slip: in general conversation he suddenly said, I don't remember on what occasion, that Mr. Astley was colossally rich and he knew it for a fact; and so Mlle Blanche might well look at Mr. Astley! The general is now thoroughly worried. It's clear what a telegram about his aunt's death could mean for him now!

Though it seemed certain to me that Polina was avoiding conversation with me, as if on purpose, I myself assumed a cold and indifferent air as well: I kept thinking she was just about to approach me. Instead, yesterday and today I turned all my attention predominantly to Mlle Blanche. The poor general, he's utterly lost! To fall in love with such strong passion at the age of fifty-five is of course a misfortune. Add to that his widowerhood, his children, his completely ruined estate, his debts, and, finally, the woman he had to fall in love with. Mlle Blanche is quite beautiful. But I don't know whether I'll be understood if I say that hers is one of those faces that can be frightening. At any rate I have always been afraid of such women. She must be about twenty-five. She is tall and well built, with shapely shoulders; her neck and bosom are luxuriant; her complexion is a swarthy yellow; her hair is black as ink, and there is a terrible amount of it, enough for two coiffures. Her eyes are black, the whites are yellowish, her gaze is insolent, her teeth are very white, her lips always rouged; she smells of musk. She dresses showily, richly, with *chic*, but with great taste. Her feet and hands are astonishing. Her voice is a husky contralto. She sometimes bursts out laughing, and with that shows all her teeth, but usually she looks

on silently and insolently—at any rate in the presence of Polina and Marya Filippovna. (A strange rumor: Marya Filippovna is leaving for Russia.) It seems to me that Mlle Blanche is without any education, is maybe not even intelligent, but instead is suspicious and cunning. It seems to me that her life has not been without adventures. If we're to say all, it may be that the marquis is no relation of hers, and her mother is not her mother. But there is information that in Berlin, where we met them, she and her mother had some respectable acquaintances. As for the marquis himself, though to this day I have my doubts that he is a marquis, his belonging to decent society, as with us, for example, in Moscow, and in some places in Germany, does not seem open to doubt. I don't know what he is in France. They say he has a château. I thought that in these two weeks a lot of water would have flowed, and yet I still don't know for certain whether anything decisive has been said between Mlle Blanche and the general. Everything now depends generally on our fortune, that is, on whether the general can show them a lot of money. If, for instance, news came that grandmother hasn't died, I'm sure Mlle Blanche would disappear at once. I find it astonishing and ridiculous, however, that I've become such a gossip. Oh, how disgusting this all is to me! With what pleasure I'd drop everyone and everything! But how can I leave Polina, how can I stop spying around her? Spying is mean, of course, but—what do I care!

I also found Mr. Astley curious yesterday and today. Yes, I'm convinced that he is in love with Polina! It's curious and ridiculous how much the gaze of a prudish and painfully chaste man, touched by love, can sometimes express, and that precisely at a moment when the man would, of course, sooner be glad to fall through the earth than say or express anything with a word or a look. We run into Mr. Astley very often during our walks. He doffs his hat and passes by, dying, naturally, from the desire to join us. If he's invited, he immediately declines. At resting places, in the vauxhall, at a concert, or near the fountain, he unfailingly stops somewhere not far from our bench, and wherever we may be, in the park, in the woods, or on the Schlangenberg—you need only raise your eyes, look around, and unfailingly somewhere, on the nearest path, or behind a bush, a little corner of Mr. Astley will appear. He seems to be seeking an occasion to speak with me privately. This morning we met and exchanged a couple of words. He sometimes speaks somehow extremely abruptly. Without even a "good morning," he began by declaring:

"Ah, Mlle Blanche!...I've seen many women like Mlle Blanche!"

He fell silent, looking at me significantly. What he wanted to say by that, I don't know, because when I asked him what it meant, he nodded with a sly smile and added: "Quite so. Is Mlle Pauline very fond of flowers?"

"I don't know, I simply don't know," I replied.

"What? You don't know that either?" he cried in great amazement.

"I don't know, I simply never noticed," I repeated, laughing.

"Hm, that gives me a particular thought." Here he nodded and walked on. He looked pleased, however. We speak to each other in the most vile French.

CHAPTER IV

TODAY WAS A RIDICULOUS, outrageous, absurd day. Now it's eleven o'clock at night. I'm sitting in my little room and remembering. It started with my having to go in the morning and play roulette for Polina Alexandrovna. I took all her hundred and sixty friedrichs d'or, but on two conditions: first, that I did not want to go halves, that is, if I won, I'd take nothing for myself; and second, that in the evening Polina would explain to me precisely why she has such a need to win and precisely how much money. I still can in no way suppose that it is simply for the sake of money. Money is obviously necessary here, and as soon as possible, for some particular purpose. She promised to explain, and I went. There was a terrible crowd in the gaming rooms. How insolent they all are, and how greedy! I pushed my way to the middle and stood right next to the croupier; then I began timidly to play, staking two or three coins. Meanwhile I observed and took note; it seemed to me that calculation meant rather little in itself and had none of the importance many gamblers attach to it. They sit with ruled sheets of paper, note down the stakes, calculate, deduce the chances, reckon up, finally place their bet, and—lose in exactly the same way as we simple mortals, who play without calculation. But, on the other hand, I drew one conclusion that seems to be correct: in the sequence of accidental chances, there is indeed, if not a system, at any rate the semblance of some order—which, of course, is very strange. For instance, it happens that after the twelve middle numbers come the twelve last ones; twice, let's say, the ball lands on these twelve last ones, and then goes on to the twelve first. Having landed on the twelve first, it goes on again to the twelve middle numbers, lands three or four times on the twelve middle ones, then again goes on to the twelve last, from where again, after landing twice, it goes on to the first, lands there once, goes on to land three times on the middle ones, and so it continues for an hour and a half, for two hours. One, three, and two; one, three, and two. It's very amusing. One day or one morning it goes, for instance, so that red alternates with black and vice versa, every moment almost without any order, so that the ball doesn't land on the same color more than two or three times in a row. But the next day, or the next evening, it happens, for instance, that it lands on red alone up to twenty-two times in a row, and it's sure to go on that way for some time—a whole day, for instance. A lot of this was explained to me by Mr. Astley, who spent the whole morning at the gaming tables, but did not stake once himself. As for me, I lost everything, and very quickly. I straight away staked twenty friedrichs d'or on evens and won, staked five and won again, and so it went two or three more times. I think about four hundred friedrichs d'or came into my hands in some five minutes. I should have walked away right then, but some strange sensation was born in me, some defiance of fate, some desire to give it a flick, to stick my tongue out at it. I placed the biggest stake permitted, four thousand guildens, and lost. Then, getting excited, I took out all I had left, staked it in the same way, and lost again, after which I left the table as if stunned. I didn't even understand what had happened to me, and announced my loss to Polina Alexandrovna only just before dinner. The time till then I spent loitering in the park.

At dinner I was again in an agitated state, just as three days ago. The Frenchman and Mlle Blanche were again dining with us. It turned out that Mlle Blanche had been in the gaming rooms that morning and had seen my exploits. This time she talked with me somehow more attentively. The Frenchman was more straightforward and simply asked me if I had really gambled away my own money. It seems to me he suspects Polina. In short, there's something there. I lied at once and said it was my money.

The general was extremely surprised: where had I gotten so much money? I explained that I had begun with ten friedrichs d'or, that six or seven wins in a row, doubled, gained me five or six thousand guildens, and that I had then lost it all in two turns.

All that, of course, was probable. While explaining it, I looked at Polina, but could make out nothing in her face. However, she let me lie and did not correct me; from that I concluded that I did have to lie and conceal that I was playing for her. In any case, I thought to myself, she owed me an explanation and this morning had promised to reveal something or other to me.

I thought the general would make some remark, but he kept silent; instead I noticed worry and uneasiness in his face. Maybe, in his tough circumstances, it was simply hard for him to hear that such a respectable pile of gold had come and gone in a quarter of an hour for such a wasteful fool as me.

I suspect that a heated controversy had taken place between him and the Frenchman yesterday evening. They had locked themselves in and talked hotly about something for a long time. The Frenchman had come out looking vexed at something, and early this morning had gone to the general again—probably in order to continue yesterday's conversation.

Hearing of my loss, the Frenchman observed to me caustically and even spitefully that I ought to be more sensible. He added, I don't know why, that while many Russians gamble, in his opinion, Russians are incapable even of gambling.

"And in my opinion, roulette is just made for Russians," I said, and when the Frenchman smirked scornfully at my response, I observed to him that, of course, the truth was on my side, because, in speaking of Russians as gamblers, I was abusing them much more than praising them, and that meant I could be believed.

"On what do you base your opinion?" asked the Frenchman.

"On the fact that the ability to acquire capital entered the catechism of virtues and merits of the civilized Western man historically and almost as the main point. While a Russian is not only incapable of acquiring capital, but even wastes it somehow futilely and outrageously. Nevertheless, we Russians also need money," I added, "and therefore we are very glad of and very prone to such methods as, for instance, roulette, where one can get rich suddenly, in two hours, without any work. We find that very attractive; but since we also gamble futilely, without working at it, we lose!"

"That is partly true," the Frenchman observed smugly.

"No, it's not true, and it's shameful to speak that way of your fatherland," the general observed sternly and imposingly.

"For pity's sake," I answered him, "is it really not clear yet which is more vile—Russian outrageousness, or the German way of accumulation through honest work?"

“What an outrageous thought!” exclaimed the general.

“What a Russian thought!” exclaimed the Frenchman.

I laughed, I wanted terribly to egg them on.

“And I’d rather spend all my life roaming about in a Kirghiz tent,” I cried, “than worship a German idol.”

“What idol?” cried the general, beginning to get seriously angry.

“The German way of accumulating wealth. I haven’t been here long, but, nevertheless, all the same, what I’ve managed to observe and verify here arouses the indignation of my Tartar blood. By God, I don’t want such virtues! I managed to make a seven-mile tour here yesterday. Well, it’s exactly the same as in those moralizing little German picture books: everywhere here each house has its *Vater*, terribly virtuous and extraordinarily honest. So honest it’s even frightening to go near him. I can’t stand honest people whom it’s frightening to go near. Each such *Vater* has a family, and in the evening they all read edifying books aloud. Over their little house, elms and chestnuts rustle. A sunset, a stork on the roof, and all of it extraordinarily poetic and touching...

“Now, don’t be angry, General, let me tell it as touchingly as possible. I myself remember my late father reading such books aloud to me and my mother in the evenings, under the lindens, in the front garden...I can judge it properly myself. Well, so every such family here is in total slavery and obedience to a *Vater*. They all work like oxen, and they all save money like Jews. Suppose the *Vater* has already saved up so many guldens and is counting on passing on his trade or bit of land to the elder son. For that the daughter is deprived of a dowry, and she remains an old maid. For that the younger son is sold into bondage or the army, and the money is joined to the family capital. Really, they do that here; I’ve asked around. All this is done not otherwise than out of honesty, out of exaggerated honesty, to the point that the sold younger son piously believes he was sold not otherwise than out of honesty—and that is the ideal thing, when the victim himself rejoices that he is being led to the slaughter. What next? Next is that for the elder son it’s also not easy: he’s got this Amalchen there, with whom his heart is united—but they can’t get married, because they haven’t saved so many guldens yet. They wait befittingly and sincerely, and with a smile go to the slaughter. Amalchen’s cheeks are sunken by now; she’s wasting away. Finally, after some twenty years, their fortune has multiplied; the guldens have been honestly and virtuously saved up. The *Vater* blesses the forty-year-old elder son and the thirty-five-year-old Amalchen, with her dried-up breasts and red nose...With that he weeps, pronounces a moral, and dies. The elder son himself turns into a virtuous *Vater*, and the same story begins all over again. In some fifty or seventy years the grandson of the first *Vater* is indeed possessed of a considerable capital and passes it on to his son, he to his, he to his, and in some five or six generations out comes Baron Rothschild himself, or Hoppe and Co.,⁵ or the devil knows what. Well, sir, isn’t that a majestic sight: a hundred- or two-hundred-year succession of work, patience, intelligence, honesty, character, firmness, calculation, a stork on the roof! What more do you want, there’s nothing higher than that, and they themselves begin to judge the whole world from that standpoint, and the guilty, that is, those just slightly unlike themselves, they punish at once. Well, sir, the thing is this: I’d rather debauch Russian-style or win at roulette. I don’t want to be a Hoppe and Co. in five generations. I need money for myself, and I don’t consider myself as something necessary to and accessory to capital. I know I’ve said a whole heap of terrible things, but so be it. Such are my convictions.”

“I don’t know if there’s much truth in what you’ve said,” the general observed pensively, “but I know for certain that you begin showing off insufferably as soon as you’re allowed to forget yourself the least bit...”

As was usual with him, he did not finish what he was saying. If our general began speaking about something just a bit more significant than ordinary conversation, he never finished. The Frenchman listened carelessly, goggling his eyes slightly. He understood almost nothing of what I said. Polina looked on with some sort of haughty indifference. It seemed she heard nothing that was said, not only by me, but by anyone else at the table this time.

CHAPTER V

S HE WAS UNUSUALLY PENSIVE, but as soon as we left the table, she told me to accompany her on a walk. We took the children and went to the fountain in the park.

As I was particularly agitated, I blurted out a question stupidly and crudely: why is it that our marquis des Grieux, the little Frenchman, not only doesn't accompany her now, when she goes out somewhere, but doesn't even speak to her for whole days at a time?

"Because he's a scoundrel," she answered strangely. I had never before heard such an opinion about des Grieux from her, and I kept silent, afraid to understand this irritability.

"And did you notice that he's not on good terms with the general today?"

"You want to know what's the matter?" she answered dryly and irritably. "You do know that the general is entirely mortgaged to him, everything he owns is his, and if grandmother doesn't die, the Frenchman immediately comes into possession of all that's mortgaged to him."

"Ah, so it's really true that everything's mortgaged? I'd heard, but didn't know it was decidedly everything."

"But of course!"

"And with that it's good-bye Mlle Blanche," I observed. "She won't be a generaless then! You know what: it seems to me the general is so in love that he might shoot himself if Mlle Blanche abandons him. At his age it's dangerous to be so in love."

"I think myself that something will happen to him," Polina Alexandrovna observed pensively.

"And how splendid that is," I cried. "She couldn't show more crudely that she had consented to marry only for money. Here even decencies weren't observed, it all happened quite without ceremony. A wonder! And as for grandmother, what could be more comical and filthy than to send telegram after telegram, asking: 'Is she dead, is she dead?' Eh? How do you like it, Polina Alexandrovna?"

"That's all nonsense," she said with disgust, interrupting me. "On the contrary, I'm astonished that you're in such a merry mood. What are you glad about? Can it be because you lost my money?"

"Why did you give it to me to lose? I told you I couldn't play for others, the less so for you. I'll obey whatever orders you give me; but the result doesn't depend on me. I warned you that nothing would come of it. Tell me, are you very crushed to have lost so much money? What do you need so much for?"

"Why these questions?"

"But you yourself promised me to explain...Listen: I'm perfectly convinced that when I start playing for myself (I have twelve friedrichs d'or), I'll win. Then take as much as you need from me."

She made a scornful face.

"Don't be angry with me," I went on, "for such an offer. I'm so pervaded by the awareness that I'm a zero before you, that is, in your eyes, that you can even accept money from me. A present from me cannot offend you. Besides, I lost yours."

She gave me a quick glance and, noticing that I was speaking irritably and sarcastically, changed the subject again:

"There's nothing interesting for you in my circumstances. If you want to know, I simply owe the money. I borrowed money and would like to pay it back. I had the crazy and strange notion that I was sure to win here at the gaming table. Why I had that notion I don't understand, but I believed in it. Who knows, maybe I believed because I had no other choice."

"Or because there was all too much *need* to win. It's exactly like a drowning man grasping at a straw. You must agree that if he weren't drowning, he wouldn't take a straw for the branch of a tree."

Polina was surprised.

"Why," she asked, "aren't you hoping for the same thing yourself? Two weeks ago you yourself once spoke to me, a lot and at length, about your being fully convinced of winning here at roulette, and tried to persuade me not to look at you as a madman—or were you joking then? But I remember you spoke so seriously that it couldn't possibly have been taken for a joke."

"That's true," I answered pensively. "To this day I'm fully convinced of winning. I'll even confess to you that you've just now led me to a question: precisely why has my senseless and outrageous loss today not left me with any doubts? I'm still fully convinced that as soon as I start playing for myself, I'm sure to win."

"Why are you so completely certain?"

"If you like—I don't know. I know only that I *need* to win, that it's also my one way out. Well, so maybe that's why it seems to me that I'm sure to win."

"Which means you also have all too much *need* to win, if you're so fanatically convinced."

"I'll bet you doubt I'm capable of feeling a serious need."

"It's all the same to me," Polina replied quietly and indifferently. "If you like—yes, I doubt that you could seriously suffer from anything. You may suffer, but not seriously. You're a disorderly and unsettled man. What do you need money for? I found nothing serious in any of the reasons you gave me then."

"By the way," I interrupted, "you said you had to repay a debt. A nice debt, then! Not to the Frenchman?"

"What are these questions? You're particularly sharp today. You're not drunk, are you?"

"You know I allow myself to say anything and sometimes ask very frank questions. I repeat, I am your slave, one is not ashamed with slaves, and a slave cannot give offense."

"That's all rubbish! And I can't stand this 'slave' theory of yours!"

"Note that I speak of my slavery not because I wish to be your slave, but just so—as of a fact that does not depend on me at all."

"Tell me straight out, why do you need money?"

"And why do you want to know that?"

"As you like," she replied and proudly tossed her head.

"You can't stand the slave theory, but you demand slavery: 'Answer and don't argue!' Very well, so be it. Why money, you ask? What do you mean, why? Money's everything!"

"I understand, but not falling into such madness from desiring it! You also reach the point of frenzy, of fatalism! There's something in it, some special goal. Speak without meandering, I want it that way."

It was as if she was beginning to get angry, and I liked terribly that she put so much heart into her questioning.

"Of course there's a goal," I said, "but I'm unable to explain what it is. No more than that with money I'll become a different person for you, and not a slave."

"What? How are you going to achieve that?"

"How achieve it? What, you don't even understand how I can achieve that you look at me otherwise than as a slave? Well, that's just what I don't want, such surprises and perplexities."

"You said this slavery was a pleasure for you. I thought so myself."

"You thought so," I cried with some strange pleasure. "Ah, how good such naïveté is coming from you! Well, yes, yes, to be enslaved to you is a pleasure. There is, there is pleasure in the ultimate degree of humiliation and insignificance!" I went on raving. "Devil knows, maybe there is in the knout, too, when the knout comes down on your back and tears your flesh to pieces... But may be I want to try other pleasures as well. Earlier at the table, in your presence, the general read me a lesson, because of the seven hundred roubles a year which I still may not even get from him. The marquis des Grioux raises his eyebrows, scrutinizes me, and at the same time doesn't notice me. And maybe I, for my part, passionately desire to take the marquis des Grioux by the nose in your presence?"

"A milksop's talk. One can behave with dignity in any situation. If there's a struggle involved, it's elevating, not humiliating."

"Straight out of a copybook! Just try to suppose that I may not know how to behave with dignity. That is, perhaps I'm a dignified man, but I don't know how to behave with dignity. Do you understand that it may be so? All Russians are that way, and you know why? Because Russians are too richly and multifariously endowed to be able to find a decent form for themselves very quickly. It's a matter of form. For the most part, we Russians are so richly endowed that it takes genius for us to find a decent form. Well, but most often there is no genius, because generally it rarely occurs. It's only the French, and perhaps some few other Europeans, who have so well-defined a form that one can look extremely dignified and yet be a most undignified man. That's why form means so much to them. A Frenchman can suffer an insult, a real, heartfelt insult, and not wince, but a flick on the nose he won't suffer for anything, because it's a violation of the accepted and time-honored form of decency. That's why our young ladies fall so much for Frenchmen, because they have good form. In my opinion, however, there's no form there, but only a rooster, *le coq gaulois*.^{*10 7} However, that I cannot understand, I'm not a woman. Maybe roosters are fine. And generally I'm driveling, and you don't stop me. Stop me more often; when I talk with you, I want to say everything, everything, everything. I lose all form. I even agree that I have not only no form, but also no merits. I announce that to you. I don't even care about any merits. Everything in me has come to a stop now. You yourself know why. I don't have a single human thought in my head. For a long time I haven't known what's going on in the world, either in Russia or here. I went through Dresden and don't remember what Dresden is like. You know yourself what has swallowed me up. Since I have no hope and am a zero in your eyes, I say outright: I see only you everywhere, and the rest makes no difference to me. Why and how I love you—I don't know. Do you know, maybe you're not good at all? Imagine, I don't even know whether you're good or not, or even good-looking? Your heart probably isn't good; your mind isn't noble; that may very well be."

"Maybe that's why you count on buying me with money," she said, "since you don't believe in my nobility?"

"When did I ever count on buying you with money?" I cried.

"Your tongue ran away with you and you lost your thread. If it's not me, it's my respect you think you can buy with money."

"Well, no, that's not so at all. I told you, it's hard for me to explain. You intimidate me. Don't be angry at my babbling. You see why it's impossible to be angry with me: I'm simply mad. But, anyhow, it's all the same to me if you are angry. When I'm upstairs in my little room, I only have to remember and imagine the rustle of your dress, and I'm ready to bite my hands. And why are you angry with me? Because I call myself a slave? Avail yourself, avail yourself of my slavery, avail yourself! Someday I'll kill you, do you know that? Not because I've fallen out of love or become jealous, but—just so, simply kill you, because I sometimes long to eat you up. You're laughing..."

"I'm not laughing at all," she said with wrath. "I order you to be silent."

She stopped, barely able to breathe from wrath. By God, I don't know whether she was good-looking or not, but I always liked looking at her when she stood before me like that, and so I often liked to provoke her wrath. I told her that.

"What filth!" she exclaimed with disgust.

"It makes no difference to me," I went on. "Do you know, too, that it's dangerous for us to go about together: many times I've had an irrepressible longing to beat you, to mutilate you, to strangle you. And what do you think, won't it come to that? You'll drive me to delirium. Am I afraid of a scandal? Of your wrath? What is your wrath to me? I love without hope, and I know that after that I'll love you a thousand times more. If I ever kill you, I'll have to kill myself, too; well, so—I'll put off killing myself for as long as I can, in order to feel this unbearable pain of being without you. Do you know an incredible thing: I love you *more* every day, and yet that's almost impossible. Can I not be a fatalist after that? Remember, two days ago on the Schlangenberg you challenged me, and I whispered: say the word and I'll jump into this abyss. If you had said the word then, I would have jumped. You don't believe I'd have jumped?"

"What stupid babble!" she cried.

"It's none of my affair whether it's stupid or intelligent," I cried. "I know that in your presence I have to talk, talk, talk—and so I talk. I lose all self-respect in your presence, and it makes no difference to me."

"Why should I make you jump off the Schlangenberg?" she said dryly and somehow especially offensively. "It would be completely

useless to me.”

“Splendid!” I cried. “You said that splendid ‘useless’ on purpose, in order to intimidate me. I see right through you. Useless, you say? But pleasure is always useful, and wild, boundless power—if only over a fly—is also a pleasure of a certain sort. Man is a despot by nature and likes to play the torturer. You like it terribly.”

I remember she studied me with some especially close attention. It must be that my face then expressed all my senseless and absurd feelings. I recall now that our conversation actually went on like that almost word for word, as I’ve described it here. My eyes were bloodshot. Froth clotted on the edges of my lips. And as for the Schlangenberg, I swear on my honor even now: if she had ordered me to throw myself down then, I would have done it! If she had said it only as a joke, said it with contempt, spitting on me—even then I would have jumped!

“No, why, I believe you,” she said, but as only she knows how to speak sometimes, with such contempt and sarcasm, with such arrogance, that, by God, I could have killed her at that moment. She was taking a risk. I also wasn’t lying about that, talking to her.

“Are you a coward?” she asked me suddenly.

“I don’t know, maybe I am. I don’t know...I haven’t thought about it for a long time.”

“If I told you: kill this man, would you kill him?”

“Who?”

“Whoever I wanted.”

“The Frenchman?”

“Don’t ask, answer—whoever I point to. I want to know whether you were speaking seriously just now.” She waited so seriously and impatiently for my reply that I felt somehow strange.

“But will you tell me, finally, what’s going on here?” I cried. “Are you afraid of me, or what? I myself can see all the disorders here. You’re the stepdaughter of a ruined and crazy man, infected with a passion for that she-devil—Blanche; then there’s this Frenchman with his mysterious influence over you, and—now you ask me so seriously...such a question. At any rate let me know: otherwise I’ll go mad right here and do something. Or are you ashamed to honor me with your candor? Can you really be ashamed with me?”

“I’m not talking about that at all. I asked you and I’m waiting for a reply.”

“Of course I’ll kill,” I cried, “whoever you order me to, but can you really...would you really order that?”

“What do you think, that I’ll feel sorry for you? I’ll order you to do it, and stay out of it myself. Can you bear that? No, how could you! You might kill on orders and then come and kill me for having dared to send you.”

It was as if something hit me on the head at these words. Of course, even then I considered her question half as a joke, as a challenge; but all the same she said it much too seriously. All the same, I was struck by her speaking it out like that, by her having such a right over me, accepting such power over me, and saying so directly: “Go to your ruin, and I’ll stay out of it.” There was something so cynical and frank in these words that, in my opinion, it was far too much. So that’s how she looks at me then? This was going beyond the bounds of slavery and nonentity. To have such a view is to raise a man to one’s own level. And however absurd, however unbelievable our whole conversation was, my heart shook.

Suddenly she burst out laughing. We were sitting on a bench then in front of the playing children, across from the place where carriages stopped and unloaded the public on the avenue before the vauxhall.

“Do you see that fat baroness?” she cried. “It’s Baroness Wurmerhelm. She came only three days ago. See her husband: a long, dry Prussian with a stick in his hand? Remember him looking us over two days ago? Go now, walk over to the baroness, take off your hat, and say something to her in French.”

“Why?”

“You swore you’d jump off the Schlangenberg; you swear you’re ready to kill if I order it. Instead of all these killings and tragedies, I want only to laugh. Go without any excuses. I want to see the baron beat you with his stick.”

“You’re challenging me; you think I won’t do it?”

“Yes, I’m challenging you, go, that’s how I want it!”

“I’ll go, if you please, though it’s a wild fantasy. Only here’s the thing: won’t there be trouble for the general, and for you through him? By God, I don’t worry about myself, but about you, well—and the general. And what is this fantasy of going and insulting a woman?”

“No, you’re a mere babbler, I can see,” she said contemptuously. “Your eyes became bloodshot earlier—however, maybe that’s because you drank a lot of wine at dinner. As if I don’t understand myself that it’s stupid, and trite, and that the general will get angry? I simply want to laugh. Well, I want to, that’s all! And why should you insult a woman? You’ll sooner get beaten with a stick.”

I turned and silently went to do her bidding. Of course it was stupid, and of course I failed to get out of it, but as I went up to the baroness, I remember something seemed to egg me on, namely, schoolboy prankishness. And I was terribly worked up, as if drunk.

CHAPTER VI

TWO DAYS HAVE NOW gone by since that stupid day. And so much shouting, noising, knocking, talking! And it's all such disorder, confusion, stupidity, and banality, and I'm the cause of it all. However, sometimes it seems funny—to me at any rate. I'm unable to give myself an accounting for what has happened to me, whether I'm indeed in a state of frenzy, or have simply jumped off the rails and gone on a rampage till they tie me up. At times it seems I'm going mad. And at times it seems I'm still not far from childhood, from the schoolbench, and it's simply crude prankishness.

It's Polina, it's all Polina! Maybe there would be no schoolboy pranks if it weren't for her. Who knows, maybe I'm doing it all out of despair (however stupid it is to reason this way). And I don't understand, I don't understand what's so good about her! Good-looking she is, though; yes, it seems she's good-looking. Others lose their minds over her, too. She's tall and trim. Only very thin. It seems to me you could tie her in a knot or bend her double. The print of her foot is narrow and long—tormenting. Precisely tormenting. Her hair has a reddish tint. Her eyes—a real cat's, but how proud and arrogant she can look with them. Four months ago, when I had just entered their service, she had a long and heated conversation with des Grieux one evening in the drawing room. And she looked at him in such a way...that later, when I went to my room to go to bed, I imagined that she had given him a slap—given it a moment before, then stood in front of him and looked at him...That evening I fell in love with her.

However, to business.

I went down the path to the avenue, stood in the middle of the avenue, and waited for the baroness and baron. From five paces away I took off my hat and bowed.

I remember the baroness was wearing a silk dress of boundless circumference, light gray in color, with flounces, a crinoline, and a train. She was short and extraordinarily fat, with a terribly fat, pendulous chin, so that her neck couldn't be seen at all. A purple face. Small eyes, wicked and insolent. She walks along as if she's doing everyone an honor. The baron is dry, tall. His face, as German faces usually are, is crooked and covered with a thousand tiny wrinkles; eyeglasses; forty-five years old. His legs begin almost at the level of his chest; that takes breeding. Proud as a peacock. A bit clumsy. Something sheeplike in the expression of his face, which in its way replaces profundity.

All this flashed in my eyes within three seconds.

My bow and the hat in my hand at first barely caught their attention. Only the baron knitted his brows slightly. The baroness just came sailing towards me.

"*Madame la baronne*," I said loudly and clearly, rapping out each word, "*j'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave*." ¹¹

Then I bowed, put my hat on, and walked past the baron, politely turning my face to him and smiling.

She had told me to take off my hat, but the bowing and prankishness were all my own. Devil knows what pushed me. It was as if I was flying off a hilltop.

"*Hein!*" cried, or, better, grunted the baron, turning to me with angry surprise.

I turned and stopped in respectful expectation, continuing to look at him and smile. He was obviously perplexed and raised his eyebrows to the *ne plus ultra*. ¹² His face was darkening more and more. The baroness also turned towards me and stared in wrathful perplexity. Passersby began to look. Some even stopped.

"*Hein!*" the baron grunted again with a redoubled grunt and with redoubled wrath.

"*Jawohl!*" ¹³ I drawled, continuing to look him straight in the face.

"*Sind Sie rasend?*" ¹⁴ he cried, waving his stick and, it seemed, beginning to turn a bit cowardly. He might have been thrown off by my outfit. I was very decently, even foppishly, dressed, like a man fully belonging to the most respectable public.

"*Jawo-o-ohl!*" I suddenly shouted with all my might, drawing out the *O* as Berliners do, who constantly use the expression *jawohl* in conversation, with that more or less drawn out letter *O* expressing various nuances of thought and feeling.

The baron and baroness quickly turned and all but fled from me in fright. Some of the public started talking, others looked at me in perplexity. However, I don't remember it very well.

I turned and walked at an ordinary pace towards Polina Alexandrovna. But I was still about a hundred yards from her bench when I saw her get up and go towards the hotel with the children.

I caught up with her by the porch.

"I performed...the foolery," I said, drawing even with her.

"Well, what of it? Now you can deal with it," she replied, without even looking at me, and went up the stairs.

That whole evening I spent walking in the park. Through the park and then through the woods, I even walked to another principality.

⁸ In one cottage I ate scrambled eggs and drank wine. For this idyll I was fleeced as much as one and a half thalers.

I came home only at eleven o'clock. The general sent for me at once.

Our people occupy two suites in the hotel; they have four rooms. The first—a big one—is the salon, with a grand piano. Next to it another big room—the general's study. He was waiting for me there, standing in the middle of the study in an extremely majestic attitude. Des Grieux was sprawled on the sofa.

"My dear sir, allow me to ask, what you have done?" the general began, addressing me.

"I would like you to get straight to the point, General," I said. "You probably want to speak of my encounter with a certain German today?"

"A certain German?! This German is Baron Wurmerhelm and an important person, sir! You were rude to him and to the baroness."

"Not in the least."

"You frightened them, my dear sir," cried the general.

"Not at all. Back in Berlin this *jawohl* got stuck in my ear, which they constantly repeat after every word and draw out so disgustingly. When I met him in the avenue, for some reason this *jawohl* suddenly popped up in my memory and had an irritating effect on me... Besides, three times now the baroness, on meeting me, has had the habit of walking straight at me as if I was a worm that could be crushed underfoot. You must agree that I, too, may have my self-respect. I took off my hat and politely (I assure you it was politely) said: '*Madame, j'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave.*' When the baron turned and shouted '*Hein!*'—I also suddenly felt pushed to shout: '*Jawohl!*' So I shouted it twice, the first time in an ordinary way, and the second time drawing it out with all my might. That's all."

I confess, I was terribly glad of this highly schoolboyish explanation. I had an astonishing wish to smear the whole story around as absurdly as possible.

And the further it went, the more I got a taste for it.

"Are you laughing at me, or what?" shouted the general. He turned to the Frenchman and told him in French that I was decidedly inviting a scandal. Des Grieux smiled contemptuously and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, don't think that, it's nothing of the sort!" I cried to the general. "My act was not nice, of course, and I admit it to you frankly in the highest degree. My act may even be called stupid and indecent prankishness, but—nothing more. And you know, General, I'm repentant in the highest degree. But there's one circumstance here which, in my eyes, almost even spares me any repentance. Lately, for some two or even three weeks, I've been feeling unwell: sick, nervous, irritable, fantastic, and on some occasions I even lose all control of myself. Really, I've sometimes wanted terribly to address the marquis des Grieux all at once and... However, there's no point in saying it; he may get offended. In short, these are signs of illness. I don't know whether Baroness Wurmerhelm will take that circumstance into consideration when I offer my apologies (because I intend to apologize). I suppose she won't, the less so in that, from what I know, this circumstance has lately been misused in the legal world: in criminal trials, lawyers have begun quite frequently to justify their clients, the criminals, by saying that at the moment of the crime they remembered nothing and that it was supposedly some such illness. 'He beat someone,' they say, 'and remembers nothing.' And imagine, General, medical science agrees with them—it really confirms that there is such an illness, such a temporary madness, when a man remembers almost nothing, or half-remembers, or a quarter-remembers. But the baron and baroness are people of the older generation, and Prussian Junkers and landowners to boot. They must still be unfamiliar with this progress in the legal and medical world, and therefore will not accept my explanations. What do you think, General?"

"Enough, sir!" the general uttered sharply and with restrained indignation, "enough! I will try to rid myself once and for all of your prankishness. Apologize to the baron and baroness you will not. Any relations with you, even if they consist solely of your asking forgiveness, would be too humiliating for them. The baron, having learned that you belong to my household, already had a talk with me in the vauxhall, and, I confess to you, a little more and he would have demanded satisfaction from me. Do you realize what you have subjected me to—me, my dear sir? I, I was forced to offer my apologies to the baron and give him my word that, immediately, this very day, you would cease to belong to my household..."

"Pardon me, pardon me, General, so it was he himself who absolutely demanded that I not belong to your household, as you're pleased to put it?"

"No; but I myself considered it my duty to give him that satisfaction, and, naturally, the baron remained pleased. We are parting, my dear sir. I still owe you those four *friedrichs* d'or and three florins in local currency. Here's the money, and here's the paper with the accounting; you may verify it. Good-bye. We are strangers from here on out. I have seen nothing from you but trouble and unpleasantness. I will summon the desk clerk at once and announce to him that starting tomorrow I do not answer for your hotel expenses. I have the honor to remain your obedient servant."

I took the money, the paper on which the accounting was penciled, bowed to the general, and said to him quite gravely:

"General, the matter cannot end this way. I am very sorry that you were subjected to unpleasantness by the baron, but—excuse me—you yourself are to blame for it. How is it that you took it upon yourself to answer to the baron for me? What is the meaning of the expression that I belong to your household? I am simply a tutor in your house, and only that. I am not your son, I am not under your guardianship, and you cannot answer for my acts. I am a legally competent person. I am twenty-five years old, I have a university degree, I am a nobleman, I am a perfect stranger to you. Only my boundless respect for your merits keeps me from demanding satisfaction from you right now and a further accounting for the fact that you took upon yourself the right to answer for me."

The general was so dumbfounded that he spread his arms, then turned to the Frenchman and told him hurriedly that I had just all but challenged him to a duel. The Frenchman guffawed loudly.

"But I do not intend to let the baron off," I continued with perfect equanimity, not embarrassed in the least by M. des Grieux's laughter, "and since you, General, by consenting today to listen to the baron's complaint, and thereby entering into his interests, have put yourself in the position of a participant, as it were, in this whole business, I have the honor to inform you that, no later than tomorrow morning, I will, in my own name, demand a formal explanation from the baron of the reasons why, having business with me, he bypassed me and addressed himself to another person, as if I could not or was not worthy to answer him for myself."

What I anticipated happened. The general, hearing this new silliness, became terribly scared.

"What, can you really intend to go on with this cursed business?" he cried. "But what are you doing to me, oh, Lord! Don't you dare, don't you dare, my dear sir, or I swear to you!... There are authorities here, too, and I... I... in short, by my rank... and the baron also... in short, you'll be arrested and sent away from here by the police, so that you won't make a row! Understand that, sir!" And though he was choking with wrath, all the same he was terribly scared.

"General," I replied, with an equanimity intolerable to him, "one cannot be arrested for rowdiness before there's any rowdiness. I have not yet begun my talk with the baron, and it is as yet completely unknown to you in what manner and on what basis I intend to go about the business. My only wish is to clarify the offensive suggestion that I am under the guardianship of a person who supposedly has power over my free will. You needn't trouble and worry yourself so much."

“For God’s sake, for God’s sake, Alexei Ivanovich, drop this senseless intention!” the general muttered, suddenly changing his wrathful tone to a pleading one and even seizing me by the hands. “Well, imagine what will come of it? Another unpleasantness! You must agree, I have to behave myself in a special manner here, especially now!...especially now!...Oh, you don’t know, you don’t know all my circumstances!...When we leave here, I’m prepared to take you back. It’s only just so, well, in short—you do understand the reasons!” he cried desperately. “Alexei Ivanovich, Alexei Ivanovich!...”

Retreating to the door, I again earnestly begged him not to worry, promised that everything would turn out well and decently, and hastened to leave.

Russians abroad are sometimes much too cowardly and are terribly afraid of what will be said of them, and how they’ll be looked at, and whether this or that will be proper; in short, they behave as if they’re in corsets, especially those who make claims to significance. What they like most is some preconceived, pre-established form, which they follow slavishly—in hotels, on promenades, at assemblies, while traveling...But on top of that the general had let slip that he had some special circumstances, that he somehow had to “behave specially.” That was why he was suddenly so pusillanimous and cowardly and changed his tone with me. I took that into consideration and made note of it. And, of course, tomorrow he might foolishly turn to some authorities, so that I indeed had to be careful.

However, I had no interest at all in angering the general himself; but I did want to anger Polina a little now. Polina had dealt so cruelly with me, and had pushed me onto such a stupid path, that I wanted very much to drive her to the point of asking me to stop. My prankishness might finally compromise her as well. Besides that, some other sensations and desires were taking shape in me. If, for instance, I voluntarily vanish into nothing before her, that does not at all mean that I’m a wet chicken before people, and it is certainly not for the baron to “beat me with a stick.” I wanted to make fun of them all and come out as a fine fellow. Let them see. Never fear! she’ll be afraid of a scandal and call for me again. And if she doesn’t, she’ll still see that I’m not a wet chicken...

(Astonishing news: I’ve just heard from our nanny, whom I met on the stairs, that Marya Filippovna set off today for Karlsbad, all by herself, on the evening train, to visit her cousin. What kind of news is that? The nanny says she had been intending to for a long time; but how is it no one knew? However, maybe only I didn’t know. The nanny let slip that Marya Filippovna had had a big talk with the general two days ago. I understand, sir. It’s probably—Mlle Blanche. Yes, something decisive is coming for us.)

CHAPTER VII

THE NEXT MORNING I sent for the desk clerk and told him that my account should be kept separately. My room was not so expensive that I should get very frightened and leave the hotel. I had sixteen friedrichs d'or, and there...there, maybe, lay riches! Strange thing, I haven't won yet, but I act, feel, and think like a rich man, and I can't imagine myself otherwise.

I planned, despite the early hour, to go at once and see Mr. Astley at the Hôtel d'Angleterre, very near us, when suddenly des Grieux came into my room. This had never happened before, and, on top of that, the gentleman and I had lately been in the most alienated and strained relations. He plainly did not conceal his contempt for me, even made an effort not to conceal it; while I—I had my own reasons not to favor him. In short, I hated him. His visit surprised me very much. I realized at once that something very special was brewing.

He came in very amiably and paid my room a compliment. Seeing that I had my hat in my hand, he inquired if I was really going for a walk so early. When he heard that I was going to see Mr. Astley on business, he reflected, understood, and his face acquired an extremely preoccupied look.

Des Grieux was like all Frenchmen, that is, cheerful and amiable when it was necessary and profitable, and insufferably dull when the necessity to be cheerful and amiable ceased. A Frenchman is rarely amiable by nature; he is always amiable as if on command, out of calculation. If, for instance, he sees the necessity of being fantastic, original, out of the ordinary, then his fantasy, being most stupid and unnatural, assembles itself out of *a priori* accepted and long-trivialized forms. The natural Frenchman consists of a most philistine, petty, ordinary positiveness—in short, the dullest being in the world. In my opinion, only novices, and Russian young ladies in particular, are attracted to Frenchmen. Any decent being will at once notice and refuse to put up with this conventionalism of the pre-established forms of salon amiability, casualness, and gaiety.

"I've come to see you on business," he began extremely independently, though, by the way, politely, "and I will not conceal that I've come as an ambassador or, better to say, a mediator from the general. Knowing Russian very poorly, I understood almost nothing yesterday; but the general explained it to me in detail, and I confess..."

"Listen, M. des Grieux," I interrupted him, "here you've undertaken to be a mediator in this business as well. I am, of course, *'un outchitel,'* and have never claimed the honor of being a close friend of this house or on any especially intimate relations, and therefore I do not know all the circumstances; but explain to me: can it be that you now fully belong to the members of this family? Because, finally, you take such interest in absolutely everything, you unfailingly become a mediator in it all straight away..."

He didn't like my question. It was only too transparent for him, and he didn't want to let anything slip.

"I am connected with the general partly by business, partly by *certain special* circumstances," he said dryly. "The general has sent me to ask you to drop your intentions of yesterday. Everything you thought up was, of course, very clever; but he has precisely asked me to represent to you that it will be a total failure; moreover, the baron will not receive you, and, finally, in any case, he has every means of ridding himself of any further unpleasantness on your part. You'll agree yourself. Why go on with it, tell me? The general has promised you that he will certainly take you back into his household at the first convenience, and until that time will credit you for your salary, *vos appointements*.^{*15} Rather profitable, is it not?"

I objected to him quite calmly that he was somewhat mistaken; that maybe I would not be chased out of the baron's, but, on the contrary, be listened to; and I asked him to admit that he had probably come in order to worm out of me precisely how I was going to set about this whole business.

"Oh, God, since the general is so involved, he would certainly like to know what you are going to do and how! It's so natural!"

I started to explain, and he began to listen, sprawling, cocking his head slightly towards me, with an obvious, unconcealed ironic nuance in his face. In general, he behaved with extreme haughtiness. I tried with all my might to pretend that I looked at the business from the most serious point of view. I explained that, since the baron had addressed a complaint against me to the general, as though I was the general's servant, he had, first of all, deprived me thereby of my post, and, second, treated me as a person who is unable to answer for himself and is not worth talking to. Of course, I am justified in feeling myself offended; however, understanding the difference in age, of position in society, and so on, and so forth (I could barely keep from laughing at this point), I do not want to take another frivolity upon myself, that is, directly demand satisfaction from the baron, or even merely suggest it to him. Nevertheless, I consider myself perfectly within my rights in offering him, and especially the baroness, my apologies, the more so in that lately I have indeed been feeling unwell, upset, and, so to speak, fantastic, and so on, and so forth. However, by offensively addressing the general yesterday and insisting that the general deprive me of my post, the baron has put me in such a position that I can no longer offer him and the baroness my apologies, because he, and the baroness, and the whole world would probably think I am coming with my apologies out of fear, in order to get my post back. It follows from all this that I now find myself forced to ask the baron to apologize to me first, in the most moderate terms—for instance, by saying he had by no means wished to offend me. And once the baron speaks it out, then I, my hands now untied, will offer him my openhearted and sincere apologies. In short, I concluded, I ask only that the baron untie my hands.

"Fie, such scrupulousness and such subtleties! And why should you apologize? Well, you will agree, *Monsieur...Monsieur...* that you are starting it all on purpose to vex the general...or perhaps you have some sort of special goals...*mon cher monsieur, pardon, j'ai oublié votre nom, monsieur Alexis?...n'est-ce pas?*"^{*16}

"Excuse me, *mon cher marquis*, but what business is that of yours?"

"*Mais le général...*"

"And what is it to the general? He said something yesterday about having to keep himself on some sort of footing...and he was so alarmed...but I understood nothing."

"Here there is...here precisely there exists a special circumstance," des Grieux picked up in a pleading tone, in which more and more vexation could be heard. "Do you know Mlle de Cominges?"

"You mean Mlle Blanche?"

"Well, yes, Mlle Blanche de Cominges...*et madame sa mère* ¹⁷...you must agree, the general...in short, the general is in love and even...the marriage may even take place here. And, imagine, at the same time various scandals, stories..."

"I don't see any scandals or stories here that have anything to do with his marriage."

"But *le baron est si irascible, un caractère prussien, vous savez, enfin il fera une querelle d'Allemand.*" ¹⁸

"It will be with me, then, not with you, since I no longer belong to the household..." (I deliberately tried to be as muddle-headed as possible.) "But, excuse me, so it's decided that Mlle Blanche will marry the general? What are they waiting for? I mean to say—why conceal it, at any rate from us, the household?"

"I cannot tell you...however, it is still not entirely...though...you know, they are waiting for news from Russia; the general must arrange his affairs..."

"Aha! *la baboulinka!*"

Des Grieux looked at me with hatred.

"In short," he interrupted, "I fully trust in your innate courtesy, your intelligence, your tact...you will, of course, do it for the family, in which you were like their own, were loved, respected..."

"Good God, I've been thrown out! You insist now that it was for the sake of appearances; but you must agree that if you say: 'Of course, I don't want to box your ears, but for the sake of appearances allow me to box your ears...' Well, isn't it almost the same?"

"If so, if no entreaties have any influence on you," he began sternly and presumptuously, "then allow me to assure you that measures will be taken. There are authorities here, you will be sent away today—*que diable! un blanc-bec comme vous* ¹⁹ wants to challenge a person like the baron to a duel! And you think you will be left alone? And, believe me, nobody here is afraid of you! If I asked, it was more on my own behalf, because you have troubled the general. And can you, can you possibly think that the baron will not simply ask a footman to throw you out?"

"But I won't go myself," I replied with extraordinary calm, "you're mistaken, M. des Grieux, it will all work out with much greater decency than you think. I will now go to Mr. Astley and ask him to be my mediator, in short, to be my second. The man likes me and certainly will not refuse me. He will go to the baron, and the baron will receive him. If I myself am *un outchitel* and seem something of a *subalterne*, well, and, finally, without protection, Mr. Astley is the nephew of a lord, a real lord, that is known to everyone, Lord Pibroch, and that lord is here. Believe me, the baron will be polite to Mr. Astley and hear him out. And if he doesn't, Mr. Astley will count it as a personal insult (you know how tenacious Englishmen are) and send a friend to the baron on his own behalf, and he has good friends. Consider now that things may not come out quite the way you reckon."

The Frenchman was decidedly scared; indeed, it all very much resembled the truth, and consequently it appeared that I really was capable of starting a whole story.

"But I beg you," he began in a thoroughly pleading voice, "drop it all! It is as if you are pleased that a whole story will come of it! It is not satisfaction you want, but a story! I told you, it will come out amusing and even clever—which is maybe what you are after—but, in short," he concluded, seeing that I had stood up and was taking my hat, "I have come to convey to you these few words from a certain person. Read them. I was told to wait for an answer."

So saying, he took from his pocket a little note, folded and sealed with wax, and handed it to me.

It was written in Polina's hand:

I have the impression that you intend to go on with this story. You're angry and are beginning to behave like a schoolboy. But there are certain special circumstances here, and later maybe I will explain them to you; so please stop it and calm yourself. How stupid this all is! I have need of you, and you have promised to obey. Remember the Schlangenberg. I beg you to be obedient, and, if need be, I order it.

Your P.

P.S. If you are angry with me about yesterday, forgive me.

Everything seemed to turn upside down as I read these lines. My lips went white, and I began to tremble. The cursed Frenchman looked on with an exaggeratedly modest air and averted his eyes from me, as if in order not to see my confusion. It would have been better if he had burst out laughing at me.

"Very well," I said, "tell *mademoiselle* not to worry. Allow me, however, to ask you," I added sharply, "why you took so long to give me this note? Instead of talking about trifles, it seems to me, you ought to have begun with it...since you came precisely on that errand."

"Oh, I wanted...generally this is all so strange that you must pardon my natural impatience. I wanted the sooner to learn your intentions for myself, from you personally. However, I do not know what is in this note, and thought I would always have time to give it to you."

"I see, you were simply told to give it to me as a last resort, and not to give it if you could settle it verbally. Right? Talk straight, M. des Grieux!"

"*Peut-être,*" ²⁰ he said, assuming an air of some special restraint and giving me some sort of special look.

I took my hat; he inclined his head and left. I fancied there was a mocking smile on his lips. And how could it be otherwise?

"We'll settle accounts, Frenchy, we'll measure forces!" I muttered, going down the stairs. I still couldn't grasp anything, as if I'd been hit on the head. The fresh air revived me a little.

After a couple of minutes, when I just began to grasp things clearly, two thoughts distinctly presented themselves to me: *first*, that

from such trifles, from a few prankish, improbable threats from a mere boy, uttered the day before in passing, such a *general* alarm had arisen! and the *second* thought—what influence, anyhow, does this Frenchman have on Polina? One word from him, and she does everything he wants, writes a note, and even *begs* me. Of course, their relations had always been an enigma to me from the very beginning, ever since I got to know them; however, in these last few days I'd noticed in her a decided loathing and even contempt for him, while he didn't even look at her, was even simply impolite to her. I'd noticed that. Polina herself spoke to me of her loathing; extremely significant confessions have burst from her...That means he's simply got her in his power, he keeps her in some sort of chains...

CHAPTER VIII

ON THE PROMENADE, as they call it here, that is, the chestnut avenue, I met my Englishman.

"Oho!" he began when he saw me, "I'm going to you, and you to me. So you've already parted from your people?"

"Tell me, first of all, how you know about all this," I asked in surprise. "Can it be that everybody knows all about it?"

"Oh, no, everybody does not know; and it's better if they don't. Nobody's talking about it."

"Then how do you know?"

"I know because I chanced to learn. Now where are you going to go from here? I like you, that's why I was coming to see you."

"You're a nice man, Mr. Astley," I said (though I was terribly struck: where did he find out?), "and since I haven't had my coffee yet, and you probably did a poor job on yours, let's go to the vauxhall café, sit there, have a smoke, and I'll tell you everything, and... you'll also tell me."

The café was a hundred paces away. Coffee was brought, we sat down, I lit a cigarette, Mr. Astley didn't light anything and, fixing his eyes on me, prepared to listen.

"I'm not going to go anywhere, I'm staying here," I began.

"I was just sure you'd stay," Mr. Astley said approvingly.

On my way to see Mr. Astley, I had had no intention and even purposely did not want to tell him anything about my love for Polina. In all those days I had scarcely said a single word to him about it. Besides, he was very shy. I had noticed from the first that Polina had made a great impression on him, but he never mentioned her name. But, strangely, suddenly, now, as soon as he sat down and fixed me with his intent, tinny gaze, an urge came over me, I don't know why, to tell him everything, that is, all my love and with all its nuances. I spent a whole half-hour telling him, and I found it extremely pleasant to be telling about it for the first time! Noticing that in some especially ardent places he became embarrassed, I deliberately increased the ardor of my story. One thing I regret: I may have said some unnecessary things about the Frenchman...

Mr. Astley listened, sitting opposite me, without moving, without uttering a word or a sound, and looking me in the eye; but when I started speaking of the Frenchman, he suddenly cut me short and asked sternly whether I had the right to mention this extraneous circumstance. Mr. Astley always put his questions in a very strange way.

"You're right: I'm afraid I don't," I replied.

"You can say nothing precise about this marquis and Miss Polina, apart from mere surmises?"

Again I was surprised at such a categorical question from such a shy man as Mr. Astley.

"No, nothing precise," I replied, "of course not."

"If so, you have done a wrong thing not only in talking about it with me, but even in thinking about it to yourself."

"All right, all right! I acknowledge it; but that's not the point now," I interrupted, surprised in myself. Here I told him the whole of yesterday's story in all its details, Polina's escapade, my adventure with the baron, my dismissal, the general's extraordinary cowardice, and finally I gave him a detailed account of today's visit from des Grieux, with all its nuances; in conclusion, I showed him the note.

"What do you make of it?" I asked. "I was precisely coming to learn your thoughts. As for me, I think I could kill that little Frenchman, and maybe I will."

"And I, too," said Mr. Astley. "As for Miss Polina...you know, we enter into relations even with people we hate, if necessity demands it of us. Here there may be relations unknown to you, which depend on extraneous circumstances. I think you can rest easy—in part, to be sure. As for her action yesterday, it is, of course, strange—not because she wanted to get rid of you and sent you under the baron's stick (which he didn't use, though I don't understand why, since he had it in his hand), but because such an escapade from such a...from such an excellent miss...is improper. Naturally, she couldn't have foreseen that you would literally carry out her jesting wish..."

"You know what?" I cried suddenly, peering intently at Mr. Astley. "I have the feeling that you've already heard about all this, and do you know from whom?—from Miss Polina herself!"

Mr. Astley looked at me in surprise.

"Your eyes flash, and I read suspicion in them," he said, recovering his former equanimity at once, "but you haven't the least right to reveal your suspicions. I cannot acknowledge that right, and I totally refuse to answer your question."

"Well, enough! And you needn't!" I cried, strangely agitated and not understanding why that had popped into my mind! And when, where, how could Mr. Astley have been chosen by Polina as a confidant? Lately, however, I had partially let Mr. Astley slip from sight, and Polina had always been an enigma to me—so much an enigma that now, for instance, in setting out to tell Mr. Astley the whole history of my love, I was suddenly struck, during the telling, by the fact that I could say almost nothing precise and positive about my relations with her. On the contrary, everything was fantastic, strange, insubstantial, and even bore no resemblance to anything.

"Well, all right, all right; I'm confused, and now there are still many things I can't grasp," I replied as if breathlessly. "However, you're a good man. Now it's a different matter, and I ask you—not advice, but opinion."

I paused and began:

"Why do you think the general got so scared? Why did they make such a story out of my most stupid mischievousness? Such a story that even des Grieux himself found it necessary to interfere (and he interferes only in the most important cases), visited me (how about that!), begged, pleaded with me—he, des Grieux, with me! Finally, note for yourself that he came at nine o'clock, just before nine, and Miss Polina's note was already in his hands. When, may I ask, was it written? Maybe Miss Polina was awakened just for that! Besides,

from that I can see that Miss Polina is his slave (because she even asked my forgiveness!)—besides that, what is all this to her, to her personally? Why is she so interested? Why are they afraid of some baron? And so what if the general is marrying Mlle Blanche de Cominges? They say they have to behave in some *special* way, owing to this circumstance—but this is much too special, you must agree! What do you think? I’m convinced by your eyes that here, too, you know more than I do.”

Mr. Astley smiled and nodded his head.

“Indeed, it seems that in this, too, I know a great deal more than you do,” he said. “This whole business concerns Mlle Blanche alone, and I’m sure it’s perfectly true.”

“Well, what about Mlle Blanche?” I cried impatiently (I suddenly had a hope that something would be revealed now about Mlle Polina).

“It seems to me that Mlle Blanche has at the present moment a special interest in avoiding any kind of meeting with the baron and baroness—all the more so an unpleasant meeting, worse still a scandalous one.”

“Well? Well?”

“Two years ago, Mlle Blanche was here in Roulettenburg during the season. And I also happened to be here. Mlle Blanche was not known as Mlle de Cominges then, nor was her mother, Madame *la veuve* Cominges, then in existence. At any rate there was no mention of her. Des Grieux—there was no des Grieux either. I nurse the profound conviction that they are not only not related to each other, but even became acquainted quite recently. Des Grieux also became a marquis quite recently—I am sure of that because of one circumstance. It may even be supposed that he became known as des Grieux quite recently as well. I know a man here who met him under a different name.”

“But he does have a respectable circle of acquaintances?”

“Oh, that may be. Even Mlle Blanche may. But two years ago Mlle Blanche, on a complaint from this same baroness, received an invitation from the local police to leave town, and leave she did.”

“How was that?”

“She appeared here first then with an Italian, some sort of prince with a historic name something like *Barberini* or something similar. A man all in rings and diamonds, and not even fake. They drove around in an astonishing equipage. Mlle Blanche played at *trente et quarante*,²¹ successfully at first, but then luck began to let her down badly; so I recall. I remember one evening she lost a considerable sum. But, worst of all, *un beau matin*²² her prince vanished no one knew where; the horses and equipage vanished, everything vanished. The hotel bill was terrible. Mlle Zelmà (instead of Barberini she suddenly turned into Mlle Zelmà) was in the last degree of despair. She howled and shrieked for the whole hotel to hear and tore her dress in rage. A certain Polish count (all traveling Poles are counts) was staying right there in the hotel, and Mlle Zelmà, who was tearing her dress and scratching her face like a cat with her beautiful perfume-washed hands, made a certain impression on him. They talked, and by dinnertime she was comforted. That evening he appeared arm in arm with her in the vauxhall. Mlle Zelmà laughed, as was her custom, quite loudly, and her manner showed a somewhat greater casualness. She entered directly into that category of roulette-playing ladies, who, as they come to the table, will shove a player aside as hard as they can with their shoulder in order to clear a space for themselves. That’s especially *chic* here among these ladies. You’ve noticed them, of course?”

“Oh, yes.”

“They’re not worth noticing. To the vexation of the decent public, there’s no lack of them here, at any rate those of them who change thousand-franc notes at the tables every day. However, as soon as they stop changing notes, they’re immediately asked to leave. Mlle Zelmà still went on changing notes; but her game went still more unluckily. Note that these ladies are quite often lucky at gambling; they have astonishing self-control. However, my story is over. One day, exactly like the prince, the count, too, vanished. Mlle Zelmà appeared in the evening to play alone; this time no one appeared to offer her his arm. In two days she lost everything. Having staked her last louis d’or and lost it, she looked around and saw Baron Wurmerhelm nearby, studying her with great attention and deep indignation. But Mlle Zelmà did not perceive the indignation and, turning to the baron with a certain kind of smile, asked him to put ten louis d’or on red for her. As a result of that, on the baroness’s complaint, she received that evening an invitation not to appear in the vauxhall anymore. If it surprises you that I know all these small and completely indecent details, it is because I finally heard them from Mr. Feeder, a relation of mine, who that same evening took Mlle Zelmà in his carriage from Roulettenburg to Spa. Now understand: Mlle Blanche wants to become the general’s wife, probably, so that she will never again receive such invitations as she did two years ago from the vauxhall police. Now she no longer gambles; but that is because, by all tokens, she now has capital, which she lends to local gamblers on interest. That is much more prudent. I even suspect that the unfortunate general owes her money. Maybe des Grieux does, too. Maybe des Grieux is her associate. You must agree that, at least until the wedding, she would not wish to attract the attention of the baron or the baroness for any reason. In short, in her position scandal is the least profitable thing for her. You are connected with their household, and your acts could cause a scandal, the more so as she appears every day in public arm in arm with the general or with Miss Polina. Now do you understand?”

“No, I don’t!” I cried, banging the table with all my might, so that the frightened *garçon* came running.

“Tell me, Mr. Astley,” I repeated in frenzy, “if you know this whole story, and consequently know by heart what Mlle Blanche de Cominges is—how is it that you haven’t warned at least me, the general himself, and above all Miss Polina, who has appeared here in the vauxhall, in public, arm in arm with Mlle Blanche? Can this be possible?”

“There was no point in warning you, because there was nothing you could do,” Mr. Astley replied calmly. “And anyhow, what was there to warn you about? The general may know more about Mlle Blanche than I do, and all the same he goes strolling with her and Miss Polina. The general is an unfortunate man. Yesterday I saw Mlle Blanche riding a splendid horse with M. des Grieux and that little Russian prince, and the general riding behind them on a chestnut. In the morning he had said that his legs hurt, but he sat his horse well. And at that moment the thought suddenly occurred to me that this was a completely lost man. Moreover, this is all none of my business, and I had the honor of meeting Miss Polina only recently. However,” Mr. Astley suddenly caught himself, “I’ve already told you that I cannot acknowledge your right to certain questions, though I sincerely like you...”

“Enough,” I said, getting up. “It’s clear as day to me now that Miss Polina also knows all about Mlle Blanche, but she can’t part with

her Frenchman, and therefore ventures to stroll with Mlle Blanche. Believe me, no other influence would induce her to stroll with Mlle Blanche and beg me in a note not to touch the baron. Here there must be precisely that influence before which everything bows! And yet it was she who loosed me on the baron! Devil take it, nothing can be sorted out here!"

"You forget, first, that this Mlle de Cominges is the general's fiancée, and, second, that Miss Polina, the general's step-daughter, has a little brother and sister, the general's own children, totally abandoned by this crazy man and, it seems, robbed as well."

"Yes, yes, that's so! Leaving the children means abandoning them completely, staying means protecting their interests, and maybe saving shreds of the estate as well. Yes, yes, that's all true! But still, still! Oh, I understand why they're all now so interested in *baboulinka*!"

"In whom?" asked Mr. Astley.

"In that old witch in Moscow who won't die and about whom they're expecting a telegram that she's dead."

"Well, yes, of course, the whole interest converges in her. The whole point lies in the inheritance! When the inheritance is announced, the general will get married; Miss Polina will be unbound, and des Grioux..."

"Well, and des Grioux?"

"Des Grioux will be paid his money; that's all he's waiting for here."

"All! You think that's all he's waiting for?"

"I know nothing more." Mr. Astley fell stubbornly silent.

"But I know, I know!" I repeated in a rage. "He's also waiting for the inheritance, because Polina will get a dowry, and once she gets the money, she'll immediately throw herself on his neck. Women are all like that! And the proudest of them come out as the most banal slaves! Polina is capable only of loving passionately and nothing more! That's my opinion of her! Look at her, especially when she's sitting alone, deep in thought: it's something predestined, foredoomed, accursed! She's capable of all the horrors of life and passion... she...she...but who's that calling me?" I suddenly exclaimed. "Who's shouting? I heard somebody shout 'Alexei Ivanovich!' in Russian. A woman's voice, listen, listen!"

At that moment we were approaching our hotel. We had left the café long ago, almost without noticing it.

"I heard a woman shout, but I don't know who she's calling; it was in Russian. Now I can see where it's coming from," Mr. Astley was pointing, "it's that woman shouting, the one sitting in a big armchair and who has just been carried up to the porch by so many footmen. They're carrying her suitcases behind her; that means the train has just arrived."

"But why is she calling me? She's shouting again; look, she's waving to us."

"I see that she's waving," said Mr. Astley.

"Alexei Ivanovich! Alexei Ivanovich! Ah, Lord, what a dolt!" desperate cries came from the porch of the hotel.

We almost ran to the entrance. I reached the landing and...my arms dropped in amazement, and my feet became rooted to the stone.

CHAPTER IX

ON THE UPPER LANDING of the wide hotel porch, carried up the steps in a chair and surrounded by manservants and maidservants and the numerous, obsequious hotel staff, in the presence of the manager himself, who had come out to meet the exalted guest arriving with so much flurry and noise, with her own servants and with so many suitcases and valises, sat—*grandmother*! Yes, it was she herself, formidable and rich, seventy-five years old, Antonida Vassilyevna Tarassevichev, a landowner and a Moscow grande dame, *la baboulinka*, about whom telegrams were sent and received, who was dying and did not die, and who suddenly, herself, in person, appeared like fresh snow on our heads. She appeared, though she couldn't walk, carried in an armchair as she had always been for the last five years, but, as was her custom, brisk, perky, self-satisfied, straight-backed, shouting loudly and commandingly, scolding everybody—well, exactly as I had had the honor of seeing her twice since the time I was taken into the general's household as a tutor. Naturally, I stood before her dumbstruck with amazement. But she had made me out with her lynx eyes from a hundred paces away, as they carried her up in her chair, had recognized me and called me by my name and patronymic—which, as was her custom, she had also memorized once and for all. "And she's the one they expected to see in a coffin, buried, and having left an inheritance," flitted through my mind, "yet she'll outlive us all and the whole hotel! But, God, what will become of all our people now, what will become of the general! She'll stand the whole hotel on its ear!"

"Well, what are you doing, dearie, standing in front of me with your eyes popping out!" grandmother went on yelling at me. "You don't know how to bow and greet a body, eh? Or you've grown proud and don't want to? Or maybe you don't recognize me? You hear, Potapych," she turned to a gray-haired old man in a tailcoat and white tie and with a pink bald spot, her butler, who had accompanied her on her journey, "you hear, he doesn't recognize me! They've got me buried! They send one telegram after another: is she dead or not? I know everything! And here, you see, I'm as alive as can be!"

"Good heavens, Antonida Vassilyevna, why would I wish you ill?" I answered cheerfully, coming to my senses. "I was only surprised...And how not marvel at such an unexpected..."

"But what's so surprising for you? I got on the train and came. It's a quiet ride, no jolts. You've been for a walk, have you?"

"Yes, I strolled to the vauxhall."

"It's nice here," said grandmother, looking around, "warm, and there's a wealth of trees. I like that. Are our people at home? The general?"

"Oh, yes! at this hour they're probably all at home."

"So they've established a schedule here and all the ceremonies? Setting the tone. I've heard they keep a carriage, *les seigneurs russes*! ²³ Blew all their money and went abroad! Is Praskovya ⁹ with him?"

"Yes, Polina Alexandrovna, too."

"And the little Frenchman? Well, I'll see them all for myself, Alexei Ivanovich, show me the way straight to him. Do you find it nice here?"

"So so, Antonida Vassilyevna."

"And you, Potapych, tell that dolt of a manager to give me comfortable quarters, nice ones, not too high up, and carry my things there at once. Why is everybody in a rush to carry me? Why are they getting at me? Eh, what slaves! Who's that with you?" she turned to me again.

"This is Mr. Astley," I replied.

"Who is this Mr. Astley?"

"A traveler, my good acquaintance; he also knows the general."

"An Englishman. That's why he's staring at me and doesn't unclench his teeth. I like Englishmen, though. Well, drag me upstairs, straight to their place; where are they?"

Grandmother was carried; I walked ahead up the wide hotel stairway. Our procession was very impressive. Everyone who came our way stopped and looked at us all eyes. Our hotel was considered the best, the most expensive, and the most aristocratic at the spa. On the stairs and in the corridors one always met magnificent ladies and important Englishmen. Many made inquiries downstairs of the manager, who, for his own part, was deeply impressed. He, of course, replied to all who asked that this was an important foreign lady, *une russe, une comtesse, grande dame*, and that she would occupy the same suite which a week before had been occupied by *la grande duchesse de N*. Grandmother's commanding and imperious figure, borne up in her chair, was the cause of the main effect. Each time she met a new person, she at once measured him with a curious gaze, and she loudly questioned me about them all. Grandmother belonged to a large breed, and though she never got up from her chair, one could tell, looking at her, that she was quite tall. She held her back straight as a board, and did not recline in the chair. Her big gray head, with its large and sharp features, was held erect; her glance was somehow even haughty and defiant; and one could see that her gaze and gestures were perfectly natural. Despite her seventy-five years, her face was quite fresh, and even her teeth had not suffered much. She was dressed in a black silk gown and a white bonnet.

"She interests me greatly," Mr. Astley whispered to me, going up the stairs beside me.

"She knows about the telegrams," I thought, "she's also been informed about des Grieux, but it seems she still knows little about Mlle Blanche." I immediately communicated this to Mr. Astley.

Sinful man! My first surprise had no sooner passed, than I rejoiced terribly at the thunderbolt we were about to produce at the general's. It was as if something was egging me on, and I led the way extremely cheerfully.

Our people were quartered on the second floor. I made no announcement, did not even knock at the door, but simply thrust it open, and grandmother was carried in in triumph. As if on purpose, they were all gathered in the general's study. It was twelve o'clock, and they seemed to be planning an excursion—some were going in carriages, others on horseback, the entire company; besides that, other acquaintances had been invited. Besides the general, Polina with the children, their nanny, there were in the study: des Grieux, Mlle Blanche, again in a riding habit, her mother Mme *la veuve* Cominges, the little prince, and also some learned traveler, a German, whom I saw with them for the first time. The chair with grandmother was set down right in the middle of the study, three paces from the general. God, I'll never forget this impression! Before we came in, the general had been telling some story, and des Grieux had been correcting him. It should be noted that for two or three days Mlle Blanche and des Grieux had for some reason been paying much court to the little prince—à *la barbe du pauvre général*,^{*24} and the company was tuned, though perhaps artificially, to the most merry and cordially familial pitch. At the sight of grandmother, the general was suddenly dumbfounded, opened his mouth, and stopped in the middle of a phrase. He stared at her, his eyes popping, as though spellbound by a basilisk's gaze. Grandmother also looked at him silently, fixedly—but what a triumphant, defiant, and mocking gaze it was! They stared at each other like that for a whole ten seconds, amid the profound silence of everyone around them. Des Grieux was petrified at first, but soon an extraordinary uneasiness flashed in his face. Mlle Blanche raised her eyebrows, opened her mouth, and gazed wildly at grandmother. The prince and the scholar contemplated the whole picture in deep perplexity. Polina's gaze expressed great astonishment and perplexity, but suddenly she turned white as a sheet; a moment later the blood quickly rushed to her face and suffused her cheeks. Yes, this was a catastrophe for them all! The only thing I did was shift my eyes from grandmother to everyone around and back. Mr. Astley stood to one side, as was his custom, calmly and decorously.

"Well, here I am! Instead of a telegram!" grandmother burst out at last, breaking the silence. "What, you didn't expect me?"

"Antonida Vassilyevna...auntie...but how on earth..." the unfortunate general murmured. If grandmother hadn't begun speaking for a few seconds more, he might have had a stroke.

"What do you mean, how? I got on the train and came. What's the railroad for? And you all thought I'd stretched out my bones and left you an inheritance? I know how you sent telegrams from here. Paid a lot of money for them, I suppose. It's not cheap from here. But I shouldered my old bones and came here. Is this that Frenchman? M. des Grieux, I believe?"

"*Oui, madame*," des Grieux picked up, "*et croyez, je suis si enchanté...votre santé...c'est un miracle...vous voir ici, une surprise charmante...*"^{*25}

"Hm, *charmante*. I know you, you mountebank, only I don't believe you even that much!" and she showed her little finger. "Who's this?" she turned, pointing to Mlle Blanche. The showy Frenchwoman in the riding habit, with a crop in her hand, apparently impressed her. "Are you a local, or what?"

"This is Mlle Blanche de Cominges, and this is her mother, Mme de Cominges; they're staying at this hotel," I reported.

"Is the daughter married?" grandmother inquired without ceremony.

"Mlle de Cominges is unmarried," I replied as respectfully as I could, purposely lowering my voice.

"A merry girl?"

I didn't understand the question at first.

"She's not boring to be with? Does she understand Russian? This des Grieux picked up a smattering of it with us in Moscow."

I explained to her that Mlle de Cominges had never been to Russia.

"*Bonjour!*" said grandmother, suddenly and abruptly addressing Mlle Blanche.

"*Bonjour, madame*," Mlle Blanche curtsied decorously and gracefully, hastening, under the cover of extraordinary modesty and politeness, to display with the whole expression of her face and figure her extreme astonishment at such a strange question and manner of address.

"Ah, she's lowered her eyes, she's mincing and prancing; you can tell the bird at once; some sort of actress. I'm staying downstairs in this hotel," she suddenly turned to the general, "I shall be your neighbor; are you glad or not?"

"Oh, auntie! Believe in the sincere feeling...of my pleasure," the general picked up. He had already recovered somewhat, and since he was capable on occasion of speaking aptly, imposingly, and with a claim to a certain effect, he began expatiating now as well. "We were so alarmed and struck by the news of your ill health...We received such hopeless telegrams, and suddenly..."

"Lies, lies!" grandmother interrupted at once.

"But how is it," the general also hastened to interrupt and raised his voice, trying to ignore this "lies," "how is it, though, that you ventured upon such a journey? You must agree that at your age and with your health...at any rate it's all so unexpected that our astonishment is comprehensible. But I'm so glad...and we all"(he started smiling sweetly and rapturously) "will try as hard as we can to make your season here pass most pleasantly..."

"Well, enough empty chatter; laying it on thick as usual; I can get along by myself. However, I have nothing against you; I don't bear any grudges. How, you ask? What's so surprising? In the simplest way. Why are they all so surprised? Hello, Praskovya. What are you doing here?"

"Hello, grandmother," said Polina, going up to her. "Was it a long trip?"

"Well, this one has asked the smartest question, none of this oh and ah! You see, I lay and lay, got treated and treated, then I chased the doctors away and summoned the sacristan from St. Nicholas's. He had cured one woman of the same illness with hay dust. Well, and he helped me; on the third day I sweated all over and got up. Then all my Germans gathered again, put on their spectacles, and began to opine: 'If you were to go abroad now to a spa and take a cure,' they said, 'your gripes would go away completely.' And why not? I thought. The Fool-Blazers start their oh-ing: 'You can't go so far!' they say. Well, so there! In one day I got ready and on Friday last week I took my maid, and Potapych, and the footman Fyodor, only in Berlin I chased this Fyodor home, because I saw there was simply no need for him, I could get here all by myself...I'm riding in a separate compartment, and there are porters at all the stations, they'll carry me wherever I like for twenty kopecks. Look, what quarters you occupy!" she concluded, glancing around. "With what money are you paying for it, dearie? Everything you've got is mortgaged. You owe quite a lump to this little Frenchman alone! I know everything, everything!"

"Auntie..." the general began, all embarrassed, "I'm astonished, auntie...it seems that, even without anyone's control, I can...what's more, my expenses do not exceed my means, and here we..."

"Don't exceed your means? Come now! You must have robbed the children of their last penny—a fine guardian!"

"After this, after such words..." the general began indignantly, "I really don't know..."

"He doesn't know! I'll bet you never leave the roulette tables here! Have you blown it all?"

The general was so astounded that he almost spluttered from the rush of his agitated feelings.

"Roulette! I? With my importance...I? You forget yourself, auntie, you must still be unwell..."

"Lies, lies; I'll bet they can't drag you away; it's all lies! I'm going to have a look at what this roulette is right today. You, Praskovya, tell me what there is to be seen here, and Alexei Ivanovich will show me, and you, Potapych, write down all the places to go. What's there to see here?" she suddenly turned to Polina again.

"There are the ruins of a castle nearby, then there's the Schlungenberg."

"What is this Schlungenberg? A woods, or what?"

"No, not a woods, it's a mountain; there's a *point*..."

"What sort of *point*?"

"The highest part of the mountain, an enclosed place. The view from there is magnificent."

"That means dragging the armchair up the mountain. Can it be done, or not?"

"Oh, it should be possible to find porters," I replied.

At that moment, Fedosya, the nanny, came up to greet grandmother, bringing the general's children.

"Well, there's no need for smooching! I don't like to kiss children, they're all snotty! How are you getting on here, Fedosya?"

"It's vur-ry, vur-ry nice here, Antonida Vassilyevna, ma'am," Fedosya replied. "And how have you been, ma'am? We've been grieving over you so."

"I know, you're a simple soul. What have you got here, all guests, or something?" she turned to Polina again. "This runty one in the spectacles?"

"That's Prince Nilsky, grandmother," Polina whispered to her.

"A Russian? And I thought he wouldn't understand! Maybe he didn't hear! I've already seen Mr. Astley. Here he is again," grandmother caught sight of him again. "Hello!" she suddenly addressed him.

Mr. Astley silently bowed to her.

"Well, do you have something nice to say to me? Say something! Translate for him, Polina."

Polina translated.

"That I am looking at you with great pleasure and rejoicing that you are in good health," Mr. Astley replied gravely, but with great readiness. It was translated for grandmother, and she obviously liked it.

"Englishmen always answer well," she observed. "For some reason I've always liked Englishmen, no comparison with these little Frenchmen! Call on me," she turned to Mr. Astley again. "I'll try not to bother you too much. Translate it for him and tell him that I'm downstairs here, downstairs here—you hear, downstairs, downstairs," she repeated to Mr. Astley, pointing down with her finger.

Mr. Astley was extremely pleased with the invitation.

Grandmother looked Polina over from head to foot with an attentive and satisfied gaze.

"I could love you, Praskovya," she said suddenly, "you're a nice girl, better than all of them, but what a little character you've got—oof! Well, yes, I have my character, too; turn around; that's not a hairpiece, is it?"

"No, grandmother, it's my own."

"Hm, I don't like this stupid modern fashion. You're a very pretty girl. I'd fall in love with you if I were a young man. How is it you don't get married? However, it's time I was off. I want to go outside, it's been nothing but the train, the train...Well, what's with you, still angry?" she turned to the general.

"Come now, auntie, for pity's sake!" the happy general roused himself. "I understand, at your age..."

"*Cette vieille est tombée en enfance*," ^{*26} des Grieux whispered to me.

"I want to have a look at everything here. Will you lend me Alexei Ivanovich?" grandmother continued to the general.

"Oh, for as long as you like, but I myself...and Polina, and M. des Grieux...we'll all consider it a pleasure to accompany you..."

"*Mais, madame, cela sera un plaisir*," ^{*27} des Grieux popped up with a charming smile.

"Hm, *plaisir*. I find you ridiculous, dearie. By the way, I won't give you any money," she suddenly added to the general. "Well, now to my suite: I must look the rooms over, and then we'll set out for all those places. Well, lift me up."

Grandmother was lifted up again, and the whole crowd of us set out, following the armchair down the stairs. The general walked as if stunned by the blow of a bludgeon on the head. Des Grieux was mulling something over. Mlle Blanche made as if to stay, but then for some reason decided to go with everybody else. The prince at once set out after her, and only the German and Mme *la veuve* Cominges stayed upstairs in the general's suite.

CHAPTER X

A T SPAS—AND, IT SEEMS, all over Europe—hotel administrators and managers, when assigning rooms to their guests, are guided not so much by their demands and wishes as by their own personal view of them; and, it must be noted, they are rarely mistaken. But grandmother, God knows why, was given such rich quarters that they even overdid it: four magnificently decorated rooms, with a bathroom, servants' quarters, a special room for the maid, and so on, and so forth. Indeed, a week earlier some *grande duchesse* had stayed in these rooms, which fact, of course, was at once announced to the new guests, to raise the price of the suite. Grandmother was carried, or rather rolled, through all the rooms, and she examined them attentively and sternly. The manager, an older man with a bald head, respectfully accompanied her on this first inspection.

I don't know who they took grandmother for, but it seems they thought her an extremely important and, above all, a very rich personage. They at once entered in the register: "*Madame la générale princesse de Tarassévitchev*," though grandmother had never been a princess. Her prestige probably began with her having her own servants, a separate compartment on the train, the endless number of unnecessary valises, suitcases, and even trunks that arrived with her; and the chair, grandmother's brusque tone and voice, her eccentric questions, asked with a most unabashed air and brooking no objections, in short, grandmother's whole figure—erect, brusque, imperious—rounded out the universal awe in which she was held. During the inspection, grandmother sometimes ordered them to stop the chair, pointed at some piece of furniture, and addressed unexpected questions to the respectfully smiling manager, who was already beginning to turn coward. Grandmother put her questions in French, which she spoke, however, quite poorly, so that I usually translated. The manager's answers were for the most part not to her liking and seemed unsatisfactory. Besides, she somehow kept asking not about essentials, but about God knows what. For instance, she suddenly stopped before a painting—a rather weak copy of some famous original on a mythological subject.

"Whose portrait is that?"

The manager declared that it was probably some countess.

"How is it you don't know? You live here and you don't know? What's it doing here? Why is she cross-eyed?"

The manager was unable to give satisfactory answers to all these questions and was even at a loss.

"What a blockhead!" grandmother retorted in Russian.

They carried her further on. The same story was repeated with a Saxony statuette, which grandmother inspected for a long time and then ordered to be removed, no one knew why. She finally badgered the manager about the cost of the bedroom carpets and where they had been made. The manager promised to find out.

"What asses!" grandmother grumbled and turned all her attention to the bed.

"Such a magnificent canopy! Unmake it."

The bed was unmade.

"Go on, go on, unmake it all. Take away the pillows, the pillowcases, lift up the feather bed."

Everything was turned upside down. Grandmother inspected it all attentively.

"A good thing they don't have bedbugs. Take off all the linen! Remake it with my linen and my pillows. Anyhow, it's all much too magnificent, an old woman like me doesn't need such a suite: I'll be bored by myself. Alexei Ivanovich, come and see me often, when you're done teaching the children."

"Since yesterday I no longer work for the general," I replied, "and I'm living in the hotel completely on my own."

"Why's that?"

"The other day a distinguished German baron and the baroness, his wife, came here from Berlin. Yesterday on the promenade I addressed him in German without keeping to the Berlin accent."

"Well, what of it?"

"He considered it insolent and complained to the general, and the general dismissed me the same day."

"What, did you abuse him, this baron, or something? (Even if you did, it wouldn't matter!)"

"Oh, no. On the contrary, the baron raised his stick at me."

"And you, you dribbler, allowed your tutor to be treated that way," she suddenly turned on the general, "and dismissed him from his post to boot! You're dunderheads—you're all dunderheads, I can see."

"Don't worry, auntie," the general replied with a slight tinge of haughty familiarity, "I know how to handle my own affairs. Besides, Alexei Ivanovich did not report it to you quite accurately."

"And you just let it pass?" she turned to me.

"I wanted to challenge the baron to a duel," I replied as modestly and calmly as I could, "but the general was against it."

"Why were you against it?" grandmother turned to the general again. "(And you may go, dearie, come back when you're called," she also turned to the manager, "no point in standing there gaping. I can't stand his Nuremberg mug!)" The man bowed and left, without, of course, understanding grandmother's compliment.

"Good heavens, auntie, duels really aren't possible," the general answered with a smile.

"Why aren't they? Men are all cocks, so they ought to fight. You're all dunderheads. I can see, you don't know how to stand up for your country. Well, lift me up! Potapych, arrange it so that two porters are always ready, hire them and settle it. No need for more than two. They'll only have to carry me on the stairs, but on the level, on the street, they can roll me—tell them that; and pay them in advance, they'll be more respectful. You yourself must always be with me, and you, Alexei Ivanovich, show me this baron on the

promenade: I'd at least like to see what sort of von baron he is. Well, so where's this roulette?"

I explained that the roulette tables were in rooms of the vauxhall. Then followed questions: how many are there? do many people play? Does it go on all day? How is it set up? I answered, finally, that it would be best of all to see it with her own eyes, and that it was quite difficult to describe it just like that.

"Well, then carry me straight there! Lead the way, Alexei Ivanovich!"

"Why, auntie, are you not even going to rest after the trip?" the general asked solicitously. He seemed to be in a bit of a flutter, and they were all somehow perplexed and began exchanging glances. They probably found it slightly ticklish, even shameful, to accompany grandmother straight to the vauxhall, where she, of course, was capable of committing all sorts of eccentricities, but now in public. However, they themselves had all volunteered to accompany her.

"Why should I rest? I'm not tired; I've been sitting for five days as it is. And then we'll go to look at what sort of springs and medicinal waters they've got and where they are. And then...what was it you said, Praskovya—a *point*, was it?"

"A *point*, grandmother."

"Well, if it's *point*, it's *point*. And what else is there here?"

"There are lots of things, grandmother," Polina hesitated.

"Eh, you don't know yourself! Marfa, you'll also come with me," she said to her maid.

"Why should she go, auntie?" the general suddenly began bustling. "And, finally, it's forbidden; it's unlikely Potapych will be allowed in the vauxhall either."

"Well, nonsense! Just because she's a servant, I should abandon her! She's also a human being; we've been riding the rails for a week now, she also wants to see things. Who will she go with, if not me? Alone she won't dare peek outside."

"But, grandmother..."

"What, are you ashamed to come with me? Stay home then, nobody's inviting you. Look, what a general; I'm a general's widow myself. And why indeed should I go dragging such a train behind me? I'll look at everything with Alexei Ivanovich..."

But des Grieux resolutely insisted that we all escort her, and produced the most amiable phrases about the pleasure of accompanying her and so on. We all set off.

"*Elle est tombée en enfance*," des Grieux kept saying to the general, "*seule elle fera des bêtises...*" ^{*28} I didn't hear any more, but he obviously had some sort of intentions, and maybe his hopes had even returned.

It was about a quarter of a mile to the vauxhall. The way led us down the chestnut avenue to the green, beyond which one went straight into the vauxhall. The general calmed down a bit, because our procession, though eccentric enough, was nevertheless decorous and decent. And there was nothing surprising in the fact of an ailing person with paralyzed legs appearing at the spa. But the general was obviously afraid of the vauxhall: why should an ailing person with paralyzed legs, and an old woman at that, go to the roulette tables? Polina and Mlle Blanche walked on either side of her, beside the rolling chair. Mlle Blanche laughed, was modestly merry, and from time to time even played up quite amiably to grandmother, so that she finally praised her. Polina, on the other hand, was obliged to answer grandmother's constant and innumerable questions, such as: "Who's that man walking by? who's that woman driving by? how big is the town? how big is the garden? What trees are those? What mountains are these? Are there eagles here? What's that funny roof?" Mr. Astley was walking beside me and whispered to me that he expected much from this morning. Potapych and Marfa walked behind, just after the chair—Potapych in his tailcoat and white tie, but in a peaked cap, and Marfa, a forty-year-old maiden, red-cheeked but already beginning to go gray, in a bonnet, a cotton dress, and creaking kidskin shoes. Grandmother turned and spoke to them very often. Des Grieux and the general lagged behind a little and talked about something with great vehemence. The general was very downcast; des Grieux talked with a resolute air. Maybe he was trying to encourage the general; obviously he was giving him advice. But earlier grandmother had already uttered the fatal phrase: "I won't give you any money." This news may have seemed incredible to des Grieux, but the general knew his aunt. I noticed that des Grieux and Mlle Blanche continued to exchange winks. I caught sight of the prince and the German traveler at the very end of the avenue: they lagged behind and made off from us somewhere.

We arrived at the vauxhall in triumph. The doorman and the attendants showed the same deference as the servants in the hotel. They looked at us, however, with curiosity. Grandmother first of all ordered them to carry her around all the rooms; some things she praised, to others she remained completely indifferent; about everything she asked questions. They finally reached the gaming rooms. The footman who was standing guard by the closed doors suddenly, as if in astonishment, flung them open.

Grandmother's appearance in the gambling hall made a deep impression on the public. There were maybe a hundred and fifty or two hundred players crowding in several rows around the roulette tables and at the other end of the room where the table for *trente et quarante* stood. Those who managed to push their way close to the table itself usually stood firm and did not relinquish their places until they lost everything; for to stand there just as simple spectators and occupy a gambling place for nothing was not allowed. Though chairs are placed around the gaming table, few of the players sit down, especially if the public gathers in large numbers—because standing people can squeeze closer together and thus gain space, and it's more convenient for placing stakes. The second and third rows crowded behind the first, waiting and keeping an eye out for their turn; but sometimes in impatience someone would thrust his arm through the first row to place his bet. Even from the third row people contrived to thrust their stakes through in this way; owing to which not ten or even five minutes would go by without some "story" over a disputed stake beginning at one end of the table or another. The vauxhall police, however, were rather good. Crowding, of course, cannot be avoided; on the contrary, the influx of the public is welcomed, because it's profitable; but the eight croupiers who sit around the table keep a sharp eye on the betting, they do the reckoning as well, and they settle disputes whenever they arise. In extreme cases, the police are summoned, and the matter is ended in a few minutes. The police are stationed right there in the hall, in plain clothes, among the spectators, so they can't be recognized. They watch out especially for pilferers and professional thieves, who are especially numerous at the roulette table, it being unusually suited to their profession. Indeed, elsewhere thefts are made from pockets or locked places—and that, in case of failure, can end very bothersomely. While here it's quite simple, you need only go up to the table, start playing, then suddenly, openly and publicly, pick up somebody else's winnings and put them in your pocket; if a dispute starts, the crook loudly and vociferously insists that the stake was his. If the thing is done deftly and the witnesses hesitate, the thief very often succeeds in awarding himself the money—if, of course,

the sum is not very considerable. In the latter case, it would certainly have been noticed earlier by the croupiers or some of the other players. But if the sum is not so considerable, the real owner, wary of a scandal, sometimes even simply declines to prolong the dispute and walks away. But if a thief is exposed, he is at once removed with a scandal.

Grandmother observed all this from a distance, with wild curiosity. She liked it very much that the thieves were removed. *Trente et quarante* aroused little curiosity in her; she much preferred roulette and the way the little ball rolled about. She wanted, finally, to have a closer look at the game. I don't understand how it happened, but the attendants and some other busybodies (mostly little Poles who had lost their money and now foisted their services on lucky players and all foreigners) at once found and cleared a place for grandmother, despite all that crowd, right at the middle of the table, next to the head croupier, and rolled her chair there. Numerous visitors who were not playing themselves, but watched the play from outside (mostly Englishmen and their families), at once pushed their way to the table to get a look at grandmother from behind the players. Numerous lorgnettes turned towards her. Hopes were born in the croupiers: such an eccentric gambler really seemed to promise something extraordinary. A seventy-year-old woman, crippled and wishing to gamble, was, of course, not an ordinary case. I also pushed my way to the table and established myself by grandmother. Potapych and Marfa stayed somewhere far to the side, among the people. The general, Polina, des Grieux, and Mlle Blanche also stationed themselves to the side, among the spectators.

Grandmother began by examining the players. She asked me sharp, abrupt questions in a half-whisper: who's that man? who's that woman? She especially liked one very young man at the end of the table, who played a very big game, staked thousands, and had already won, as the whisper went around, up to forty thousand francs, which lay in a heap before him, in gold and banknotes. He was pale; his eyes flashed and his hands trembled; he staked now without any calculation, as much as his hands snatched up, and yet he kept winning and winning, raking and raking it all in. Attendants bustled about him, put a chair behind him, cleared a space around him so that he would have more room and not be crowded—all this in expectation of a rich reward. Certain players, when they're winning, will sometimes give them money without counting, just like that, out of joy, also as much as their hand snatches from their pocket. A little Pole had already settled himself next to the young man, bustling with all his might, and whispered something to him, respectfully but constantly, probably telling him how to stake, advising and directing the play—naturally, also hoping for a handout afterwards. But the gambler scarcely looked at him, staking at random and raking it all in. He was obviously becoming flustered.

Grandmother observed him for several minutes.

"Tell him," grandmother suddenly fluttered up, giving me a nudge, "tell him to quit, to take the money and leave quickly. He'll lose, he'll lose everything now!" she fussed, nearly breathless with agitation. "Where's Potapych? Send Potapych to him! Tell him, tell him," she nudged me, "no, where indeed is Potapych? *Sortez, sortez*," ²⁹ she herself began shouting to the young man. I bent down to her and whispered resolutely that it was not permitted to shout like that here, nor even to raise one's voice a little, because it interfered with the counting, and that we'd be turned out at once.

"How vexing! The man's lost, which means he wants it that way himself...I can't watch him, I'm all upset. What a dolt!" And grandmother quickly turned in another direction.

There, to the left, on the other side of the table, among the players, a young lady could be noticed and beside her some sort of dwarf. Who this dwarf was, I don't know: a relation of hers perhaps, or else just brought along for effect. I had noticed the lady before; she came to the gaming table every day at one in the afternoon and left at exactly two; she played for one hour every day. They knew her by now and offered her a chair at once. She would take some gold from her pocket, some thousand-franc notes, and begin to stake quietly, coolly, with calculation, marking the numbers on a paper with her pencil and trying to find the system by which the chances were grouped at the moment. She staked significant amounts. Every day she won one, two, at the most three thousand francs, not more, and, having won, she immediately left. Grandmother studied her for a long time.

"Well, that one's not going to lose! that one there's not going to lose! What is she? You don't know? Who is she?"

"A Frenchwoman, must be, or the like," I whispered.

"Ah, you can tell a bird by its flight. You can see her little nails are sharpened. Now explain to me what every turn means and how to stake."

I explained to grandmother, as far as possible, the meaning of the numerous combinations of stakes, *rouge et noir*, *pair et impair*, *manque et passe*, ³⁰ and, finally, various nuances in the system of numbers. Grandmother listened attentively, memorized, asked again, and learned by heart. Each system of stakes could be illustrated at once by an example, so that many things could be learned and memorized very easily and quickly. Grandmother remained quite pleased.

"And what is *zéro*? Why did this croupier, the head one, the curly one, cry *zéro* just now? And why did he rake in everything that was on the table? Such a pile, and he took it all for himself? What's that?"

"It's *zéro*, grandmother, the bank's profit. If the ball lands on *zéro*, everything that was put on the table goes to the bank without counting it up. True, another spin is permitted so as to restart the game, but the bank pays nothing."

"Fancy that! And I don't get anything?"

"No, grandmother, if you staked on *zéro* beforehand, and it comes up *zéro*, they pay you thirty-five times the amount."

"What, thirty-five times? And does it come up often? The fools, why don't they stake on it?"

"The odds are thirty-six to one, grandmother."

"That's rubbish! Potapych! Potapych! Wait, I have money on me—here!" She took a tightly stuffed purse from her pocket and took out a *friedrich d'or*. "Here, stake it right now on *zéro*."

"Grandmother, *zéro* just came up," I said, "that means it won't come up for a long time now. You'll lose heavily; wait awhile at least."

"Eh, lies, go on, stake!"

"As you wish, but it may not come up till evening, you'll lose as much as a thousand, such things happen."

"Eh, nonsense, nonsense! Nothing ventured, nothing gained. What? you lost? Stake again!"

We lost the second *friedrich d'or*; staked a third. Grandmother could barely sit still, she simply fastened her burning eyes on the ball bouncing over the grooves of the turning wheel. We lost the third as well. Grandmother was beside herself, she simply couldn't sit still,

she even banged her fist on the table when the croupier announced *trente-six* ^{*31} instead of the hoped-for *zéro*.

"Drat it!" grandmother said angrily, "won't that cursed little *zéro* come up sometime soon? I'll wait for it even if it's the death of me! It's all this cursed curly croupier's doing, he never gets it to come up! Alexei Ivanovich, stake two gold pieces at once! If we stake so little, then, even if *zéro* does come up, there won't be any gain."

"Grandmother!"

"Stake them, stake them! They're not yours."

I staked two friedrichs d'or. The ball rolled around the wheel for a while, then began bouncing over the grooves. Grandmother froze and squeezed my hand, and suddenly—plop!

"*Zéro*," announced the croupier.

"You see, you see!" grandmother quickly turned to me, beaming all over and very pleased. "I told you, I told you! The Lord himself put it into my head to stake two gold pieces. Well, how much will I get now? Why don't they give it to me? Potapych, Marfa, where are they? Where have all our people gone? Potapych, Potapych!"

"Later, grandmother," I whispered. "Potapych is by the door, they won't let him in here. Look, grandmother, they're giving you your money, take it!" They tossed her a heavy roll of fifty friedrichs d'or sealed in dark blue paper and counted out another twenty unsealed friedrichs d'or. I raked it all towards grandmother.

"*Faites le jeu, messieurs! Faites le jeu, messieurs! Rien ne va plus?*" ^{*32} proclaimed the croupier, inviting the stakes and preparing to spin the wheel.

"Lord! we're too late! They're about to spin it! Stake, stake!" grandmother fussed. "Don't dawdle, be quick," she was getting beside herself, nudging me with all her might.

"Stake on what, grandmother?"

"On *zéro*, on *zéro*! on *zéro* again! Stake as much as possible! How much do we have? Seventy friedrichs d'or? No point in saving them, stake twenty friedrichs d'or at one go."

"Collect yourself, grandmother! Sometimes it doesn't come up once in two hundred turns! I assure you, you'll lose all your capital."

"Eh, lies, lies! stake it! Don't wag your tongue! I know what I'm doing." Grandmother was even shaking with frenzy.

"According to the rules, you're not allowed to stake more than twelve friedrichs d'or at a time on *zéro*, grandmother—so that's what I'm staking."

"How not allowed? You wouldn't be lying, would you? Moosieu, moosieu!" she began nudging the croupier, who was sitting just to her left and preparing to spin, "*combien zéro? douze? douze?*" ^{*33}

I hastened to explain her question in French.

"*Oui, madame*," the croupier confirmed politely, "just as no single stake may exceed four thousand florins at a time, according to the rules," he added in explanation.

"Well, no help for it, stake twelve."

"*Le jeu est fait!*" ^{*34} cried the croupier.

The wheel spun, and thirteen came up. We lost!

"Again! again! again! stake again!" cried grandmother. I no longer objected and, shrugging my shoulders, staked another twelve friedrichs d'or. The wheel spun for a long time. Grandmother simply trembled as she watched it. "Does she really think she'll win again on *zéro*?" I thought, looking at her in astonishment. A decided conviction of winning shone in her face, an unflinching expectation that there was just about to be a cry of "*Zéro!*" The ball jumped into the groove.

"*Zéro!*" cried the croupier.

"So there!!!" grandmother turned to me in furious triumph.

I myself was a gambler; I felt it that same moment. My hands and feet were trembling, my head throbbed. Of course, it was a rare case that *zéro* should pop up three times in some ten turns; but there was nothing especially surprising about it. I myself had witnessed, two days ago, how *zéro* came up three times *in a row*, and one of the players, who zealously noted down all the turns on papers, observed aloud that no longer ago than the previous day that same *zéro* had come up just once in a whole twenty-four hours.

As grandmother had won the most significant sum, they paid her with particular attention and deference. She was to receive exactly four hundred and twenty friedrichs d'or, that is, four thousand florins and twenty friedrichs d'or. She was given the twenty friedrichs d'or in gold and the four thousand in banknotes.

This time grandmother did not call Potapych; she was otherwise occupied. She didn't even nudge me or tremble outwardly. She trembled—if it's possible to put it so—inwardly. She was all concentrated on something, aiming at it:

"Alexei Ivanovich! he said one can stake only four thousand florins a time? Here, take and put this whole four thousand on red," grandmother decided.

It was useless to try talking her out of it. The wheel spun.

"*Rouge!*" announced the croupier.

Again a win of four thousand florins, meaning eight in all. "Give me four here, and put four on red again," grandmother commanded.

I staked four thousand again.

"*Rouge!*" the croupier announced once more.

"A total of twelve! Give it all here. Pour the gold here, into this purse, and put away the banknotes.

"Enough! Home! Roll on!"

CHAPTER XI

THE CHAIR WAS ROLLED to the door at the other end of the room. Grandmother was beaming. All our people crowded around her at once with congratulations. However eccentric grandmother's behavior was, her triumph covered up a lot, and the general no longer feared compromising himself in public by being related to such an odd woman. With a condescending and familiarly cheerful smile, as if placating a child, he congratulated grandmother. However, he was evidently struck, as were all the spectators. The people around were talking and pointing at grandmother. Many walked past her in order to get a closer look. Mr. Astley, standing to one side, was talking about her with two Englishmen of his acquaintance. Several majestic spectators, ladies, gazed at her as at some wonder, with majestic perplexity. Des Grieux simply dissolved in smiles and congratulations.

"*Quelle victoire!*" ^{*35} he kept saying.

"*Mais, madame, c'était du feu!*" ^{*36} Mlle Blanche added with a flirtatious smile.

"Yes, ma'am, I just up and won twelve thousand florins! Twelve, nothing, what about the gold? With the gold it comes out to nearly thirteen. How much is that in our money? Some six thousand, eh?"

I reported that it was over seven and, with the exchange what it was, maybe even eight.

"No joking, eight thousand! And you dunderheads sit here and do nothing! Potapych, Marfa, did you see?"

"Dearie, but how can it be? Eight thousand roubles!" Marfa exclaimed, twining about.

"Take, here's five gold pieces from me for each of you, here!"

Potapych and Marfa rushed to kiss her hands.

"The porters get one friedrich d'or each. Give them a gold piece each, Alexei Ivanovich. What's that attendant bowing for, and the other one also? Congratulating me? Give them each a friedrich d'or as well."

"*Madame la princesse...un pauvre expatrié...malheur continuel...les princes russes sont si généreux,*" ^{*37} a person twined about the armchair, in a shabby frock coat, a motley waistcoat, a mustache, holding a peaked cap in his outstretched hand, and with an obsequious smile...

"Give him a friedrich d'or as well. No, give him two; well, enough, there'll be no end to it. Up and carry! Praskovya," she turned to Polina Alexandrovna, "tomorrow I'll buy you stuff for a dress, and also for this Mlle...how's she called, Mlle Blanche, or something, I'll also buy her stuff for a dress. Translate, Praskovya!"

"*Merci, madame,*" Mlle Blanche curtsied sweetly, twisting her mouth into a mocking smile, which she sent to des Grieux and the general. The general was a bit embarrassed and was terribly glad when we reached the avenue.

"Fedosya, I'm thinking how surprised Fedosya will be now," said grandmother, remembering her acquaintance, the general's nanny. "She should also be given money for a dress. Hey, Alexei Ivanovich, Alexei Ivanovich, give something to this beggar!"

Some ragamuffin with a bent back was going down the road and looking at us.

"Maybe he's not a beggar, grandmother, but some sort of rascal."

"Give! give! give him a gulden!"

I went over and gave it to him. He gazed at me in wild perplexity, though he silently took the gulden. He reeked of wine.

"And you, Alexei Ivanovich, have you tried your luck yet?"

"No, grandmother."

"Your eyes were burning, I saw it."

"I'll try it yet, grandmother, for certain, later on."

"And stake directly on *zéro*! You'll see! How much capital do you have?"

"Only twenty friedrichs d'or, grandmother."

"Not much. I'll lend you fifty friedrichs d'or, if you like. Here's that same roll, take it, and you, dearie, don't get your hopes up, I won't give you anything!" she suddenly turned to the general.

The man was as if bowled over, but he said nothing. Des Grieux frowned.

"*Que diable, c'est une terrible vieille!*" ^{*38} he whispered to the general through his teeth.

"A beggar, a beggar, again a beggar!" cried grandmother. "Alexei Ivanovich, give this one a gulden, too."

This time we met a gray-haired old man on a wooden leg, in some sort of long-skirted blue frock coat and with a long cane in his hand. He looked like an old soldier. But when I offered him a gulden, he stepped back and examined me menacingly.

"*Was ist's der Teufel!*" ^{*39} he cried, adding another dozen oaths.

"Eh, the fool!" cried grandmother, waving her hand. "Drive on! I'm hungry! I'll have dinner right now, then loll about for a bit and go back again."

"You want to gamble again, grandmother?" I cried.

"What do you think? You all sit here and mope, so I've got to look at you?"

"*Mais, madame,*" des Grieux came closer, "*les chances peuvent tourner, une seule mauvaise chance and vous perdrez tout...surtout avec votre jeu...c'était terrible!*" ^{*40}

"*Vous perdrez absolument,*" ^{*41} chirped Mlle Blanche.

"What is it to all of you? It's my money I'll be losing, not yours! And where is that Mr. Astley?" she asked me.

"He stayed at the vauxhall, grandmother."

"A pity; he's such a nice man."

On reaching home, grandmother, meeting the manager while still on the stairs, called to him and boasted of her win; then she called Fedosya, gave her three friedrichs d'or and ordered dinner served. Fedosya and Marfa simply dissolved before her during dinner.

"I'm watching you, dearie," Marfa rattled out, "and I say to Potapych, what is it our dearie means to do? And all that money on the table, all that money, saints alive! in my whole life I never saw so much money, and gentlefolk all around, nothing but gentlefolk. How is it, Potapych, I say, it's all such gentlefolk here? Mother of God, I think, help her. I'm praying for you, dearie, and my heart sinks, it just sinks, I'm trembling, I'm trembling all over. Grant her, Lord, I think, and so here the Lord sent it to you. And till now I'm still trembling, dearie, just trembling all over."

"Alexei Ivanovich, after dinner, at around four, get ready and we'll go. Meanwhile, good-bye—oh, yes, and don't forget to send me some little doctor, I also have to drink the waters. Or else you may forget."

I left grandmother's as if in a daze. I tried to imagine what would happen now with all our people and what turn affairs would take. I saw clearly that they (the general mainly) had not yet managed to collect their senses, even from the first impression. The fact of grandmother's appearance, instead of the telegram about her death (and therefore about the inheritance as well) that had been expected at any moment, had so shattered the whole system of their intentions and already-made decisions, that they treated grandmother's further exploits at roulette with decided perplexity and a sort of stupor, which had come over them all. And yet this second fact was almost more important than the first, because, though grandmother had twice repeated that she would give no money to the general, who could tell—all the same they should not lose hope yet. Des Grieux, who was involved in all the general's affairs, had not. I was sure that Mlle Blanche, who was also quite involved (what else: a general's wife and a considerable inheritance!) would not lose hope and would use all the seductions of coquetry on grandmother—in contrast to the proud and unyielding Polina, who was not given to tenderness. But now, now, when grandmother had performed such exploits at roulette, now, when grandmother's personality was stamped so clearly and typically before them (an obstinate, domineering old woman, *et tombée en enfance*)—now perhaps all was lost: why, she was pleased, like a child, to have gotten down to it, and, as usually happens, would lose her shirt. God! I thought (and, Lord forgive me, with the most malicious laughter), God, every friedrich d'or grandmother had staked today had left a sore spot in the general's heart, had infuriated des Grieux, and had driven Mlle de Cominges, who felt the spoon going past her mouth, to a frenzy. Here is another fact: even after winning, in her joy, when grandmother had given money to everybody and had taken every passerby for a beggar, even then she had let slip to the general: "But all the same I won't give you anything!" Which meant she was stubbornly fixed on this thought, had promised it to herself—dangerous! dangerous!

All these considerations wandered through my head while I was going up the central stairway from grandmother's to the topmost floor, to my little room. All this concerned me greatly; though, of course, I could guess in advance the main, the thickest threads connecting the actors before me, I still did not ultimately know all the means and secrets of this game. Polina was never fully trusting with me. Though, true, it did happen that she would open her heart to me occasionally, as if inadvertently, I noticed that often, even almost always, after being open, she either turned everything she had said to ridicule, or deliberately made it look confused and false. Oh, she concealed a lot! In any case, I sensed that the finale was approaching for this whole mysterious and tense situation. One more stroke and everything would be finished and revealed. About my own fate, which was also caught up in it all, I almost didn't worry. I was in a strange mood: in my pocket a total of twenty friedrichs d'or; I'm far away in a foreign land, with no post and no means of existence, no hopes, no plans and—it doesn't worry me! If it hadn't been for the thought of Polina, I would simply have surrendered myself entirely to the comic interest of the coming denouement and laughed my head off. But Polina confounds me. Her fate is being decided, I can feel that, but, I confess, it's not at all her fate that troubles me. I'd like to penetrate her secrets; I'd like her to come to me and say: "I love you," and if not, if that madness is unthinkable, then...well, what should I wish for? Do I know what to wish for? I'm as if lost myself; all I need is to be near her, in her aura, in her radiance, forever, always, all my life. Beyond that I know nothing! And can I possibly leave her?

On the third floor, in their corridor, it was as if something nudged me. I turned and, twenty or more paces away, saw Polina coming out the door. She seemed to have been waiting and watching for me, and immediately beckoned to me.

"Polina Alexandrovna..."

"Quiet!" she warned.

"Imagine," I whispered, "it's as if something just nudged me in the side; I turn around—it's you! As if you give off some kind of electricity!"

"Take this letter," Polina said with a preoccupied and frowning air, probably without hearing what I had just said, "and deliver it personally to Mr. Astley right away. Be quick, I beg you. No reply is needed. He himself..."

She didn't finish. "To Mr. Astley?" I repeated in astonishment.

But Polina had already disappeared through the door.

"Aha, so they correspond!" Naturally, I ran at once to look for Mr. Astley, first in his hotel, where I didn't find him, then in the vauxhall, where I ran around all the rooms, and finally, in vexation, almost in despair, on my way home, I met him by chance in a cavalcade of some English men and ladies, on horseback. I beckoned to him, stopped him, and gave him the letter. We had no time even to exchange glances. But I suspect that Mr. Astley deliberately hastened to urge his horse on.

Was I tormented by jealousy? I was indeed in the most broken state of mind. I didn't even want to know what they corresponded about. So he was her confidant! "A friend he may be," I thought, and that was clear (and when had he found time to become one?), "but is there love in it?" "Of course not," reason whispered to me. But reason alone is not enough in such cases. In any case, this, too, was to be clarified. The business was becoming unpleasantly complicated.

I no sooner entered the hotel than the doorman and the manager, coming out of his room, informed me that I was being asked for, looked for, that three times there had been an inquiry about where I was, and a request that I go as quickly as possible to the general's suite. I was in the nastiest state of mind. In the general's study, besides the general himself, I found des Grieux and Mlle Blanche, alone, without her mother. The mother was decidedly a dummy personage, used only for display; when it came to real *business*, Mlle Blanche managed by herself. And the woman scarcely knew anything about her presumed daughter's affairs.

The three of them were hotly conferring about something, and the door of the study was even shut, something that had never happened before. Approaching the door, I heard loud voices—the brazen and caustic talk of des Grieux, the impudently abusive and furious shouting of Blanche, and the pitiful voice of the general, who was apparently trying to justify himself for something. On my appearance, they all seemed to restrain themselves and put themselves to rights. Des Grieux put his hair to rights and made his angry face into a smiling one—with that nasty, officially courteous French smile I hate so much. The general, crushed and at a loss, assumed a dignified air, but somehow mechanically. Mlle Blanche alone made scarcely a change in her anger-flashing physiognomy and only fell silent, directing her gaze at me with impatient expectation. I will note that till then she had treated me with incredible negligence, had not even responded to my greetings—simply hadn't noticed me.

"Alexei Ivanovich," the general began in a gently upbraiding tone, "allow me to declare to you that it is strange, strange in the highest degree...in short, your behavior regarding me and my family...in short, strange in the highest degree..."

"Eh! *ce n'est pas ça*," ⁴² des Grieux interrupted with vexation and contempt. (He decidedly had the upper hand in everything!) "*Mon cher monsieur, notre cher général se trompe*" ⁴³ when he lapses into this tone" (I continue his speech in Russian), "but he wanted to tell you...that is, to warn you, or, better to say, to earnestly beg you not to ruin him—oh, yes, not to ruin! I am using precisely this expression..."

"But how, how?" I interrupted.

"Good heavens, you've undertaken to be the guide (or how do they say?) of this old woman, *cette pauvre terrible vieille*," des Grieux himself became confused, "but she will lose; she will lose her shirt and everything! You've seen yourself, you've witnessed the way she plays! If she begins to lose, she won't leave the table, out of stubbornness, out of anger, and she'll keep on playing, keep on playing, and in such cases one can win nothing back, and then...then..."

"And then," the general picked up, "then you will ruin the entire family! Me and my family, we're her heirs, she has no closer relations. I'll tell you frankly: my affairs are in disarray, extreme disarray. You partly know yourself...If she loses a considerable sum, or even perhaps the whole fortune (oh, God!), what will become of them then, of my children!" (the general turned to des Grieux) "of me!" (He looked at Mlle Blanche, who turned away from him with contempt.) "Alexei Ivanovich, save us, save us!..."

"But how, General, tell me, how can I...What do I amount to here?"

"Refuse, refuse, drop her!..."

"Then she'll find somebody else!" I cried.

"*Ce n'est pas ça, ce n'est pas ça*," des Grieux interrupted again, "*que diable!* No, don't drop her, but at any rate exhort her, talk to her, distract her...Well, finally, don't let her lose too much, distract her somehow."

"But how can I do that? If you were to take it upon yourself, M. des Grieux," I added as naïvely as I could.

Here I noticed the quick, fiery, questioning glance Mlle Blanche gave des Grieux. In des Grieux's own face something peculiar flashed, something frank, which he was unable to hold back.

"That's just it, that she won't take me now!" des Grieux cried, waving his hand. "If only!...later..."

Des Grieux glanced quickly and significantly at Mlle Blanche.

"Oh, *mon cher Monsieur Alexis, soyez si bon*," ⁴⁴ Mlle Blanche herself stepped towards me with an enchanting smile, seized me by both hands, and pressed them firmly. Damn it all, that devilish face knew how to change in a single second! She instantly acquired such a pleading face, so sweet, childishly smiling, and even mischievous; at the end of the phrase she gave me a sly wink, in secret from everyone; did she mean to undercut me all at once, or what? And it didn't come off badly—only it was crude, terribly crude.

The general jumped up after her—precisely jumped:

"Alexei Ivanovich, forgive me for speaking to you like that earlier, I meant to say something else...I beg you, I implore you, I bow down before you Russian-style—you, you alone can save us! Mlle de Cominges and I implore you—you understand? you do understand?" he implored, indicating Mlle Blanche to me with his eyes. He was very pitiful.

At that moment there came three quiet and respectful knocks at the door; they opened—the floorboy had knocked, and a few steps behind him stood Potapych. The ambassadors were from grandmother. There was a request to find me and deliver me immediately—"she being angry," Potapych informed me.

"But it's still only half-past three!"

"She couldn't sleep, kept tossing, then suddenly got up, demanded her chair, and sent for you. She's already on the porch, sir..."

"*Quelle mégère!*" ⁴⁵ cried des Grieux.

Indeed, I found grandmother already on the porch, losing patience over my absence. She couldn't wait till four o'clock.

"Well, lift me up!" she cried, and we set off again for the roulette tables.

CHAPTER XII

GRANDMOTHER WAS IN AN impatient and irritable state of mind; it was clear that roulette had lodged itself firmly in her head. She paid no attention to anything else, and was generally extremely distracted. For instance, she didn't ask questions about anything on the way, as she had earlier. Seeing a very rich carriage that raced past us like the wind, she raised her hand and asked: "What's that? Whose is it?"—but didn't seem to hear my reply; her pensiveness was constantly broken by abrupt and impatient movements and actions. When I pointed out Baron and Baroness Wurmerhelm in the distance, as we were approaching the vauxhall, she looked distractedly and said quite indifferently: "Ah!"—and, turning quickly to Potapych and Marfa, who were walking behind her, said sharply:

"Well, why are you tagging along? You needn't be taken every time! Go home! You're enough for me," she added to me, when the other two hastily bowed and returned home.

Grandmother was already expected in the vauxhall. She was at once allotted the same place next to the croupier. It seems to me that these croupiers, who are always so decorous and pretend to be ordinary officials for whom it is decidedly almost all the same whether the bank wins or loses, are not at all indifferent to the bank's losses and, of course, are furnished with certain instructions for attracting gamblers and keeping better watch over the establishment's interests—for which they certainly receive prizes and awards. At any rate they already looked upon grandmother as a nice little victim. Thereupon, what had been assumed of us—happened.

Here's how it went.

Grandmother fell directly on *zéro* and straight away ordered me to stake twelve friedrichs d'or. We staked once, twice, three times—*zéro* wouldn't come up. "Go on, stake!" grandmother nudged me impatiently. I obeyed.

"How many times have we lost?" she asked finally, grinding her teeth in impatience.

"That was the twelfth stake, grandmother. We've lost a hundred and forty-four friedrichs d'or. I tell you, grandmother, it may not be till evening..."

"Silence!" grandmother interrupted. "Stake on *zéro*, and right now stake a thousand guldens on red. Here, take the banknote."

Red came up, but the *zéro* lost again; we won back a thousand guldens.

"See, see!" whispered grandmother, "we won back almost everything we lost. Stake again on *zéro*; we'll stake ten more times and drop it."

But by the fifth time grandmother had become quite bored.

"To hell with it, drop that nasty little *zéro*. Here, stake all four thousand guldens on red," she ordered.

"Grandmother! it's too much, what if red doesn't come up?" I implored; but grandmother nearly hit me. (However, she nudged me so hard that one could almost call it beating.) There was nothing to be done, I staked all the four thousand guldens we had won earlier on red. The wheel spun. Grandmother sat calmly and proudly erect, not doubting the certainty of winning.

"*Zéro*," announced the croupier.

At first grandmother didn't understand, but when she saw the croupier rake in her four thousand guldens along with everything that was on the table, and learned that the *zéro* which had taken so long to come up, and on which we had lost almost two hundred friedrichs d'or, had popped up, as if on purpose, just when grandmother denounced it and dropped it, she cried "Ah!" and clasped her hands for the whole hall to see. People around her even laughed.

"Saints alive! The cursed thing had to pop up just now!" grandmother yelled. "What a fiendish, fiendish thing! It's you! It's all you!" she fell upon me ferociously, shoving me. "You talked me out of it."

"Grandmother, I talked sense to you, how can I be responsible for all the chances?"

"I'll give you your chances!" she whispered threateningly. "Get out of here!"

"Good-bye, grandmother," I turned to leave.

"Alexei Ivanovich, Alexei Ivanovich, stay! Where are you going? Well, what is it? what is it? Look, he's angry! Fool! Stay, stay awhile, don't be angry, I'm a fool myself! Well, tell me, what am I to do now?"

"I won't venture to tell you, grandmother, because you're going to accuse me. Play on your own; order me, and I'll stake."

"Well, well! so stake another four thousand guldens on red! Here's my wallet, take it." She took the wallet from her pocket and gave it to me. "Well, take it quickly, there's twenty thousand roubles in cash here."

"Grandmother," I whispered, "such amounts..."

"I'll win it back if it kills me. Stake!" We staked and lost.

"Stake, stake, stake the whole eight thousand!"

"I can't, grandmother, the biggest stake is four!..."

"Stake four then!"

This time we won. Grandmother took heart. "See, see!" she nudged me. "Stake four again."

We staked and lost; staked again and lost again.

"Grandmother, the whole twelve thousand is gone," I reported.

"I see it's gone," she said in some sort of calm fury, if I may put it so, "I see, dearie, I see," she muttered, staring fixedly in front of her and as if pondering. "Eh, even if it kills me, stake another four thousand guldens!"

"But we have no money, grandmother; there are some Russian five percent notes and some postal money orders in the wallet, but no money."

"And in the purse?"

"Only small change left, grandmother."

"Do they have exchange bureaus here? I was told I could cash any Russian papers here," grandmother asked resolutely.

"Oh, as much as you like! But you'll lose so much on the exchange that...the Jew himself will be horrified."

"Rubbish! I'll win it back. Take me. Call those blockheads!"

I rolled the chair away, the porters appeared, and we rolled out of the vauxhall. "Hurry, hurry!" grandmother commanded. "Show the way, Alexei Ivanovich, the shortest...is it far?"

"Two steps away, grandmother."

But at the turn from the green into the avenue, we met our whole company: the general, des Grieux, and Mlle Blanche with her mama. Polina Alexandrovna was not with them, nor was Mr. Astley.

"Well, well, well! no stopping!" shouted grandmother. "Well, what do you care? I have no time for you!"

I walked behind; des Grieux sprang over to me.

"She lost all she won in the morning and blew twelve thousand guildens of her own. We're on our way to exchange the five percent notes," I whispered to him hurriedly.

Des Grieux stamped his foot and dashed to tell the general. We went on rolling grandmother.

"Stop her, stop her!" the general whispered in a frenzy.

"You go and try stopping her," I whispered to him.

"Auntie!" the general approached, "auntie...we're just...we're just..." his voice trembled and faltered, "going to hire horses and drive out of town...A most delightful view...a *point*...we were on our way to invite you."

"Eh, you and your *point*!" grandmother waved him away irritably.

"There's a village...we'll have tea..." the general went on, now in total despair.

"*Nous boirons du lait, sur l'herbe fraîche*," ⁴⁶ des Grieux added with ferocious spite.

Du lait, de l'herbe fraîche—that's all a Parisian bourgeois has of the ideally idyllic; therein, as everybody knows, lies his view of "*la nature et la vérité*!" ^{147 10}

"Eh, you and your milk! Go and guzzle it yourself, it gives me a bellyache. Why are you bothering me?!" cried grandmother. "I tell you, I have no time!"

"Here we are, grandmother!" I cried. "This it it!"

We rolled up to the house where the banker's office was. I went to exchange the notes; grandmother stayed waiting by the entrance; des Grieux, the general, and Blanche stood to one side, not knowing what to do. Grandmother looked at them wrathfully, and they went off down the road to the vauxhall.

I was offered such terrible terms that I didn't dare accept and went back to grandmother to ask for instructions.

"Ah, the robbers!" she cried, clasping her hands. "Well! Never mind! Exchange them!" she cried resolutely. "Wait, call the banker to me!"

"Maybe one of the clerks, grandmother?"

"All right, a clerk, it's all the same. Ah, the robbers!"

The clerk agreed to come out, having learned that he had been asked by a paralyzed old countess who couldn't walk. Grandmother reproached him for thievery, at length, wrathfully, and loudly, and bargained with him in a mixture of Russian, French, and German, with me helping to translate. The grave clerk kept looking at the two of us and silently wagging his head. He gazed at grandmother even with a much too intent curiosity—which was impolite. Finally, he began to smile.

"Well, away with you!" cried grandmother. "Choke on my money! Exchange with him, Alexei Ivanovich, there's no time, otherwise we could go elsewhere..."

"The clerk says others will give still less."

I don't remember the figures exactly, but it was terrible. I exchanged about twelve thousand florins in gold and notes, took the receipt, and brought it to grandmother.

"Well! well! well! No point in counting it," she waved her hands, "quick, quick, quick!"

"I'll never stake on that cursed *zéro*, nor on red either," she said as we approached the vauxhall.

This time I tried as hard as I could to persuade her to make smaller stakes, insisting that, with a turn of the chances, there would always be a moment for staking a big amount. But she was so impatient that, though she agreed at first, it was impossible to hold her back during the play. As soon as she began to win stakes of ten or twenty friedrichs d'or, "Well, there! Well, there!" she began nudging me, "well, there, we've won—if we'd staked four thousand instead of ten, we'd have won four thousand, and what now? It's all you, all you!"

And vexed as I was, watching her play, I finally decided to keep quiet and give no more advice.

Suddenly des Grieux sprang over. The three of them were nearby; I noticed that Mlle Blanche and her mama were standing to one side, exchanging courtesies with the little prince. The general was obviously out of favor, almost in the doghouse. Blanche didn't even want to look at him, though he fidgeted about her with all his might. Poor general! He turned pale, red, trembled, and even no longer followed grandmother's play. Blanche and the little prince finally left; the general ran after them.

"*Madame, madame*," des Grieux whispered to grandmother in a honeyed voice, having pushed his way close to her ear. "*Madame*, stake no go that way...no, no, no possible..." he spoke in distorted Russian, "no!"

"And how, then? Go on, teach me!" grandmother turned to him. Des Grieux suddenly began babbling rapidly in French, giving advice, fussing, saying one had to wait for the chance, started calculating some numbers...Grandmother understood nothing. He turned to me constantly, asking me to translate; jabbed his finger at the table, pointing, finally snatched a pencil and was beginning to work something out on paper. Grandmother finally lost patience.

"Well, away, away with you! it's all rubbish! *madame, madame*—and he doesn't understand a thing himself. Away!"

"*Mais, madame*," chirped des Grieux, and again he began nudging and pointing. He was all worked up.

"Well, stake once as he says," grandmother told me, "let's see; maybe it will really work."

Des Grieux wanted only to distract her from big stakes: he suggested staking on numbers singly and in groups. I staked, at his direction, one friedrich d'or on each of the series of odd numbers from one to twelve, and five friedrichs d'or on groups of numbers between twelve and eighteen, and between eighteen and twenty-four: in all we staked sixteen friedrichs d'or.

The wheel spun. "Zéro," cried the croupier. We lost everything.

"What a blockhead!" cried grandmother, turning to des Grieux. "Vile little Frenchman that you are! You and your fiendish advice! Away, away! He doesn't understand a thing, and he pokes his nose into it anyway!"

Terribly offended, des Grieux shrugged his shoulders, gave grandmother a contemptuous look, and walked off. He felt ashamed now that he had gotten involved; he just couldn't help it.

An hour later, despite all our efforts, we had lost everything.

"Home!" cried grandmother.

She didn't say a word till we got to the avenue. In the avenue and already approaching the hotel, exclamations began to escape her.

"What a fool! what a great big fool! You old fool, you!"

We had only just entered the suite: "Bring me tea!" grandmother cried, "and get ready at once! We're going!"

"Where would you be pleased to be going, dearie?" Marfa tried to ask.

"What business is that of yours? To your last, shoemaker! Potapych, pack up everything, all the luggage! We're going back to Moscow! I've *verspieled* ⁴⁸ away fifteen thousand roubles!"

"Fifteen thousand, dearie! My God!" cried Potapych, clasping his hands touchingly, probably hoping to oblige.

"Well, well, you fool! None of this sniveling! Silence! Get ready! The bill, quickly, quickly!"

"The next train leaves at half-past nine, grandmother," I reported, to stop her furor.

"And what is it now?"

"Half-past seven."

"How vexing! Well, never mind! Alexei Ivanovich, I haven't a kopeck. Here are two more notes, run off to that place, exchange them for me. Otherwise I'll have nothing for the road."

I went. Half an hour later, on returning to the hotel, I found all our people at grandmother's. Having learned that grandmother was leaving altogether for Moscow, they seemed to be even more struck than by her losses. Suppose that going away would save her fortune, but what would become of the general now? Who would pay des Grieux? Mlle Blanche certainly wouldn't wait until grandmother died, and would probably slip away now with the little prince or somebody else. They were all standing in front of her, comforting her, trying to talk sense into her. Polina again was not there. Grandmother was shouting furiously at them.

"Leave me alone, you devils! What business is it of yours? Why is this goat-beard getting at me?" she shouted at des Grieux. "And you, you shank of a girl, what do you want?" she turned to Mlle Blanche. "What are you fussing about?"

"*Diantre!*" ⁴⁹ whispered Mlle Blanche, her eyes flashing with rage, but she suddenly burst out laughing and left.

"*Elle vivra cent ans!*" ⁵⁰ she cried to the general from the doorway.

"Ah, so you're counting on my death?" grandmother screamed at the general. "Get out! Throw them all out, Alexei Ivanovich! Is it any of your business? I've blown my money, not yours!"

The general shrugged his shoulders, stooped, and left. Des Grieux followed.

"Call Praskovya," grandmother told Marfa.

Five minutes later Marfa returned with Polina. All this time Polina had been sitting in her room with the children and, it seems, had purposely decided not to go out all day. Her face was serious, sad, and preoccupied.

"Praskovya," grandmother began, "is it true, what I learned from someone today, that your fool of a stepfather supposedly wants to marry that silly French fidget—an actress, isn't she, or something still worse? Tell me, is it true?"

"I don't know for certain, grandmother," Polina answered, "but from the words of Mlle Blanche herself, who finds concealment unnecessary, I conclude..."

"Enough!" grandmother interrupted energetically, "I understand everything! I always reckoned he was up to just that, and always considered him the emptiest and flightiest of men. He goes around swaggering that he's a general (he got the rank after he retired as a colonel), and putting on airs. I know it all, my dear, how you sent telegram after telegram to Moscow—'Will the old crone turn her toes up soon?' They were waiting for the inheritance; without money, that mean wench—what's her name?—de Cominges or something, wouldn't even take him as a lackey, with false teeth at that. They say she has heaps of money herself, lends it on interest, having earned it in a nice way. I don't blame you, Praskovya; it wasn't you who sent the telegrams; nor do I want to remember old wrongs. I know what a nasty character you've got—a wasp! it swells when you sting, but I feel sorry for you, because I loved your late mother Katerina. Well, do you want to drop all this here and come with me? You've got nowhere to go; and it's improper for you to be with them now. Wait!" grandmother interrupted Polina, who was about to begin a reply, "I haven't finished yet. I won't demand anything of you. My house in Moscow you know—it's a palace, you can have a whole floor and not come down to see me for weeks, if you don't fancy my character. Well, do you want to or not?"

"Allow me to ask you first: do you really mean to leave right now?"

"Do you think I'm joking, dearie? I said I'd leave, and I'll leave. I've dumped fifteen thousand roubles today at your thrice-cursed roulette. Five years ago I promised to replace the wooden church on my estate near Moscow with a stone one, and instead I whistled it away here. Now, dearie, I'm going to go and build that church."

"And the waters, grandmother? Haven't you come to take the waters?"

"Eh, you and your waters! Don't vex me, Praskovya; are you doing it on purpose, or what? Tell me, will you come along?"

"I thank you very, very much, grandmother," Polina began with feeling, "for the refuge you're offering me. You've partly guessed my situation. I'm so grateful that, believe me, I may even come to you soon; but now there are reasons...important ones...and I can't decide at once, this minute. If you were staying two weeks..."

"You mean you don't want to?"

"I mean I can't. Besides, in any case I can't leave my brother and sister, and since...since...since they may indeed be all but abandoned, then...if you'll take me with the little ones, grandmother, I'll certainly come to you, and, believe me, I'll come to deserve it of you," she added warmly, "but without the children I can't, grandmother."

"Well, don't snivel!" (Polina had never thought of sniveling, and she never cried.) "There'll be room for the chicks as well; it's a big chicken coop. Besides, it's time they went to school. Well, so you're not coming now? Well, Praskovya, watch out! I'd like to wish you well, but I know why you're not coming. I know everything, Praskovya! That little Frenchman won't bring you any good."

Polina flushed. I gave a start. (Everybody knows! I alone, therefore, know nothing!)

"Well, well, don't frown. I won't embroider on it. Only watch out that nothing bad happens, understand? You're a smart girl; I'd be sorry for you. Well, enough, I don't even want to look at you all! Go! Good-bye!"

"I'll still come to see you off, grandmother," said Polina.

"No need to; don't bother me, I'm sick of you all."

Polina kissed grandmother's hand, but she pulled her hand away and kissed Polina on the cheek.

As she passed me, Polina glanced at me quickly and at once turned away.

"Well, good-bye to you, too, Alexei Ivanovich! It's only an hour till the train. And you're tired of me, I think. Here, take these fifty gold pieces."

"I humbly thank you, grandmother, I'm ashamed to..."

"Well, well!" cried grandmother, but so energetically and menacingly that I didn't dare refuse and accepted.

"In Moscow, when you're running around without a job, come to me; I'll recommend you to someone. Well, out with you!"

I went to my room and lay down on the bed. I think I lay for half an hour on my back, my hands thrust behind my head. The catastrophe had broken out, there was something to think about. I decided imperatively to talk with Polina tomorrow. Ah! the little Frenchman? So then it's true! What could there be to it, though? Polina and des Grieux! Lord, what a juxtaposition!

All this was simply unbelievable. I suddenly jumped up, beside myself, to go looking for Mr. Astley at once and make him speak at all costs. Here, too, of course, he knows more than I do. Mr. Astley? There's another riddle for me!

But suddenly there came a knock at my door. I looked—Potapych.

"Alexei Ivanovich, my dear: the mistress, she's calling."

"What is it? Is she leaving or something? It's still twenty minutes till the train."

"She's restless, my dear, can barely sit still. 'Quick, quick!'—meaning you, my dear; for Christ's sake, don't delay."

I raced downstairs at once. Grandmother had already been rolled out to the corridor. She had the wallet in her hands.

"Alexei Ivanovich, lead the way, come on!..."

"Where to, grandmother?"

"It may kill me, but I'll win back what I lost! Well, march, no questions! They play till midnight there, don't they?"

I was dumbfounded, reflected, but made up my mind at once.

"As you will, Antonida Vassilyevna, but I won't go."

"Why not? What's this now? Are you all moonstruck or something?"

"As you will, but afterwards I'd reproach myself; I don't want to! I don't want either to witness it or to participate in it; spare me, Antonida Vassilyevna. Here are your fifty friedrichs d'or back; good-bye!" And, placing the roll of friedrichs d'or right there on a little table next to grandmother's chair, I bowed and left.

"What rubbish!" grandmother cried after me. "Don't come then, if you please, I'll find the way myself! Potapych, come with me! Well, pick me up, get going."

I didn't find Mr. Astley and went back home. Late, past midnight, I learned from Potapych how grandmother's day had ended. She had lost everything I had exchanged for her earlier, that is, another ten thousand roubles, by our reckoning. That same little Pole to whom she had given two friedrichs d'or had attached himself to her and guided her play the whole time. First, before the little Pole, she had made Potapych stake for her, but soon chased him away; it was then that the little Pole popped up. As luck would have it, he understood Russian and could even chatter in a mixture of three languages, so that they somehow managed to understand each other. Grandmother scolded him mercilessly all the time, and though he constantly "laid himself out at my lady's feet," he was "no comparison with you, Alexei Ivanovich," Potapych recounted. "She treated you *as a gentleman*, but that one—I saw it with my own eyes, God strike me dead—he stole from her right there at the table. She caught him twice and railed at him, my dear, railed at him with all sorts of words, and even pulled his hair once, really, I'm not lying, so that there was laughter all around. She lost everything, my dear; everything she had, everything you exchanged for her. We brought her here, the dear lady—she just asked for a drink of water, crossed herself, and went to bed. Wore herself out, must be, fell asleep at once. May God send her angelic dreams! Ah, these foreign parts!" Potapych concluded. "I said no good would come of it. We ought to hurry back to our Moscow! We've got everything at home in Moscow. A garden, flowers such as don't exist here, fragrance, apples ripening, vastness—no, she had to go abroad! Oh, oh, oh!..."

CHAPTER XIII

I T'S ALMOST A WHOLE month now since I've touched these notes of mine, begun under the effect of strong though disorderly impressions. The catastrophe, the approach of which I anticipated then, did come, but a hundred times more drastically and unexpectedly than I had thought. It was all something strange, ugly, and even tragic, at any rate for me. Certain things happened to me that were almost miraculous; so at least I look at them to this day—though from another point of view, and especially judging by the whirl I was then spinning in, they were at most only somewhat out of the ordinary. But most miraculous of all for me was the way I regarded these events. To this day I don't understand myself! And it all flew away like a dream—even my passion, and yet it really was strong and true, but...where has it gone now? Indeed, the thought occasionally flits through my head: "Didn't I go out of my mind then and spend the whole time sitting in a madhouse somewhere, and maybe I'm sitting there now—so that for me it was all a *seeming* and only *seems* to this day..."

I collected and reread my pages. (Who knows, maybe so as to convince myself that I hadn't written them in the madhouse?) Now I'm all alone. Autumn is coming, the leaves are turning yellow. I'm sitting in this dreary little town (oh, how dreary little German towns are!), and instead of thinking over the next step, I live under the influence of feelings just past, under the influence of fresh memories, under the influence of all this recent whirl, which drew me into that turbulence then, and threw me out of it again somewhere. It still seems to me at times that I'm spinning in the same whirl, and that the storm is about to rush upon me, snatch me up with its wing in passing, and I will again break out of all order and sense of measure, and spin, spin, spin...

However, maybe I'll settle somehow and stop spinning, if I give myself as precise an account as possible of all that happened this month. I'm drawn to my pen again; and sometimes there's nothing at all to do in the evenings. Strangely, in order to occupy myself with at least something, I go to the mangy local library and take out the novels of Paul de Kock ⁴¹ (in German translation!), which I can barely stand, but I read them and—marvel at myself: it's as if I'm afraid to spoil the charm of what has only just passed by a serious book or some serious occupation. As if this ugly dream and all the impressions it left behind are so dear to me that I'm even afraid to touch it with something new, lest it vanish in smoke! Is it so dear to me, or what? Yes, of course it is; maybe I'll remember it even forty years later...

And so, I set about writing. However, all this can now be told partially and more briefly: the impressions are not at all the same...

First, to finish with grandmother. The next day she definitively lost everything. That's how it had to happen: once that kind of person starts out on this path, then, like sliding down a snowy hill on a sled, it all goes faster and faster. She played all day, until eight o'clock in the evening; I wasn't present when she played and know it only from hearsay.

Potapych attended her at the vauxhall the whole day. The little Poles who guided grandmother changed several times that day. She started by chasing away the previous day's little Pole, whose hair she had pulled, and taking another one, but he turned out to be almost worse. Having chased that one away and taken back the first one, who hadn't left and poked about during the whole time of his banishment right there behind her chair, thrusting his head in every moment—she finally fell into decided despair. The second chased-away little Pole also refused to leave; one stationed himself to her right, the other to her left. They quarreled and abused each other all the time over stakes and strategy, called each other *lajdak* ^{*51} and other Polish compliments, then made peace again, threw money around without any order, gave directions in vain. When they quarreled, they each staked on his own side, one, for instance, on red, and the other, at the same time, on black. The end was that they got grandmother completely muddled and thrown off, so that she finally turned to the old croupier, all but in tears, asking him to protect her and chase them away. They were, in fact, chased away at once, despite their shouts and protests: they both shouted in unison, trying to prove that grandmother owed them money, that she had deceived them in some way, had acted dishonestly, meanly. Miserable Potapych told it to me in tears, that very evening after they lost, complaining that the Poles had stuffed their pockets with money, that he himself had seen them stealing shamelessly and constantly shoving money into their pockets. One, for instance, would wheedle five friedrichs d'or from grandmother for his labors and straight away stake them on the roulette table next to grandmother's stakes. Grandmother would win, and he would shout that it was his stake that had won, and grandmother's had lost. When they were chased out, Potapych stepped forward and reported that they had pockets full of gold. Grandmother at once asked the croupier to take measures, and though both little Poles began squawking (just like two snatched roosters), the police appeared and their pockets were emptied at once in grandmother's favor. All that day, until she lost everything, grandmother had enjoyed a conspicuous authority with the croupiers and the whole vauxhall administration. Her renown had gradually spread through the town. All the visitors to the spa, from all nations, the ordinary and the most notable, flocked to look at "*une vieille comtesse russe tombée en enfance*," who had already lost "several million."

But grandmother gained very, very little from having rid herself of the two Poles. In their place a third Pole appeared at once to serve her, speaking perfectly pure Russian, dressed like a gentleman, though he smacked of the footman all the same, with enormous mustaches and with *gonor*. ^{*52} He, too, kissed "the *pani*'s feet" ^{*53} and "laid himself out at the *pani*'s feet," but he treated everyone around him with arrogance, gave despotic orders—in short, he established himself at once not as grandmother's servant, but as her master. Every moment, with every round, he turned to her and swore terrible oaths that he was a *gonorable pan* ^{*54} and would not take a kopeck of grandmother's money. He repeated these oaths so often that she finally became frightened. But since this *pan* at first actually seemed to improve her play and began to win a little, grandmother herself could no longer part with him. An hour later the two

previous little Poles, who had been taken out of the vauxhall, appeared once more behind grandmother's chair, again offering their services, if only to run errands. Potapych swore by God that the *gonorable pan* exchanged winks with them and even put something in their hands. Since grandmother had had no dinner and had hardly ever left her chair, one of the Poles actually proved useful: he ran next door to the vauxhall dining room and fetched her a cup of bouillon, and later tea as well. They both went, however. But towards the end of the day, when everybody could see that she was about to lose her last banknote, there were as many as six little Poles standing behind her chair, never seen or heard of before. And by the time grandmother was losing her last coins, they all not only didn't listen to her, but didn't even notice her, reached out to the table right over her, grabbed the money themselves, gave orders and placed stakes themselves, argued and shouted, chatted with the *gonorable pan* in a *pan*-brotherly way, while the *gonorable pan* even all but forgot about grandmother's existence. Even when, having lost everything, grandmother was returning to the hotel at eight o'clock in the evening, three or four little Poles still refused to leave her and ran on both sides of her chair, shouting with all their might and insisting in a quick patter that grandmother had cheated them in some way and had to pay them something. Thus they came right up to the hotel, where, at last, they were driven away.

By Potapych's reckoning, grandmother lost in that day a total of ninety thousand roubles, besides the money she had lost the day before. All her bonds—the five percent bonds, the state bonds, all the shares she had brought with her—she had cashed one after the other. I marveled at her ability to hold out for the whole seven or eight hours, sitting in her chair and hardly ever leaving the table, but Potapych told me that, on some three occasions, she had actually begun to win heavily, and, borne up by renewed hope, had no longer been able to leave. However, gamblers know how a man can sit almost around the clock in the same place over cards, without taking his eyes off the right one or the left.

Meanwhile, all that day quite decisive things were happening with us in the hotel. In the morning, before eleven o'clock, when grandmother was still at home, our people—that is, the general and des Grieux—resolved upon an ultimate step. Learning that grandmother had no thought of leaving, but, on the contrary, was setting out again for the vauxhall, the whole conclave of them (except for Polina) came to talk things over with her definitively and even *openly*. The general, trembling and his heart sinking in view of the terrible consequences for him, even overdid it: after half an hour of begging and pleading, and even having openly acknowledged everything, that is, all his debts, and even his passion for Mlle Blanche (he was totally lost), the general suddenly assumed a threatening tone and even began shouting and stamping his feet at grandmother; he shouted that she had disgraced their name, that she had become a scandal for the whole town, and finally...finally: "You have disgraced the name of Russia, madam!" shouted the general, "and there are police for that!" Grandmother finally drove him out with a stick (a real stick). That morning the general and des Grieux conferred once or twice more, interested precisely in whether it might in fact be possible to use the police. That is, thus and so, the unfortunate but venerable old lady has lost her wits, is gambling away her last money, and so on. In short, mightn't it be possible to petition for some sort of custody or restriction?...But des Grieux only shrugged his shoulders and laughed in the face of the general, who was now pouring out complete drivel and running up and down the study. Finally, des Grieux waved his hand and disappeared somewhere. In the evening it turned out that he had left the hotel altogether, having first talked things over quite decisively and mysteriously with Mlle Blanche. As for Mlle Blanche, she had taken definitive measures that same morning: she had thrust the general away from her altogether and did not even allow him to come into her presence. When the general ran after her to the vauxhall and met her arm in arm with the little prince, neither she nor Mme *la veuve* Cominges recognized him. The little prince also did not bow to him. All that day Mlle Blanche probed and worked on the prince, so that he would finally declare himself decisively. But, alas! She was cruelly deceived in counting on the prince! This minor catastrophe took place in the evening; it was suddenly discovered that the prince was naked as a worm, and was counting on borrowing money from her on a promissory note and playing roulette. Blanche indignantly threw him out and locked herself in her room.

That same morning I went to see Mr. Astley, or, better to say, I spent the whole morning looking for Mr. Astley, but couldn't find him anywhere. He was neither at home, nor in the vauxhall, nor in the park. He did not dine at his hotel that day. Between four and five, I suddenly saw him coming from the railway platform straight to the Hôtel d'Angleterre. He was hurrying and very preoccupied, though it was hard to make out the preoccupation or any sort of perplexity in his face. He offered me his hand affably, with his usual exclamation: "Ah!" but without stopping in the road and continuing on his way at a rather quick pace. I tagged along behind him; but he was somehow able to answer me in such a way that I didn't manage to ask him about anything. Besides, for some reason I was terribly ashamed to ask about Polina; he didn't ask a word about her himself. I told him about grandmother; he listened attentively and gravely, and shrugged his shoulders.

"She'll lose everything," I observed.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "she already went to play earlier, as I was leaving, and so I knew for certain that she'd lose. If I have time I'll stop by the vauxhall to have a look, because it's curious..."

"Where did you go?" I cried, amazed that I hadn't asked till then.

"I was in Frankfurt."

"On business?"

"Yes, on business."

Well, what more was there for me to ask? However, I was still walking beside him, but he suddenly turned into the Hôtel des Quatre Saisons, which stood on the road, nodded to me, and disappeared. On the way home I gradually realized that, even if I talked with him for two hours, I would learn decidedly nothing, because...I had nothing to ask him! Yes, of course, it was so! There was no way I could now formulate my question.

All that day, Polina either walked in the park with the children and the nanny, or sat at home. She had long been avoiding the general and barely spoke to him, at any rate about anything serious. I had long noticed it. But, knowing the situation the general was in that day, I thought he couldn't pass her by, that is, it was impossible for there not to be any important family discussions. Nevertheless, when, on returning to the hotel after my conversation with Mr. Astley, I met Polina and the children, her face reflected the most untroubled calm, as if all the family storms had passed by her alone. In response to my bow she nodded her head. I came to my room totally angry.

Of course, after the incident with the Wurmerhelms, I avoided talking with her and never once got together with her. In that I was partly showing off and posturing; but as time went on, real indignation seethed in me more and more. Even if she didn't love me in the least, it still seemed wrong to trample on my feelings that way and receive my declarations with such contempt. She does know that I truly love her; she herself has allowed, has permitted me to speak that way with her! True, it began somehow strangely with us. Sometime long ago now, a good two months back, I began to notice that she wanted to make me her friend, a confidant, and she was even partly testing me. But for some reason it didn't get going between us then; and instead it has remained in these present strange relations; that was why I began to speak that way with her. But if she's repulsed by my love, why not forbid me outright to speak of it?

She doesn't forbid me; she herself even occasionally initiated a conversation with me, and...of course, did it to make fun of me. I know for certain, I firmly noted it—it was a pleasure for her to listen to me and exacerbate me painfully, to stun me suddenly with a show of the greatest contempt and negligence. And she knows that I can't live without her. It's three days now since the story with the baron, and I can no longer bear our *separation*. When I met her just now near the vauxhall, my heart beat so hard that I turned pale. But she can't survive without me either! She needs me and—can it be, can it be only as a buffoon Balakirev? ¹²

She has a secret—that's clear! Her conversation with grandmother pricked my heart painfully. A thousand times I've invited her to be frank with me, and she knew that I was actually ready to lay down my life for her. But she always got off with near contempt, or, instead of the sacrifice of my life, which I had offered her, demanded escapades from me like that time with the baron! Isn't it outrageous? Can it be that for her the whole world is in this Frenchman? And Mr. Astley? But here the affair was becoming decidedly incomprehensible, and meanwhile—God, how I suffered!

Having come home, in a fit of rage I seized a pen and scribbled the following:

Polina Alexandrovna, I see clearly that the denouement has come, which will, of course, affect you as well. I repeat for the last time: do you need my life or not? If you need me *for anything at all*—I am at your disposal, and meanwhile I'll be sitting in my room, at least most of the time, and won't go anywhere. If need be—write me or send for me.

I sealed this note and sent it with the floorboy, with orders that he put it directly into her hands. I didn't expect an answer, but three minutes later the floorboy came back, saying that "the lady sends her greetings."

Sometime after six I was summoned to the general.

He was in his study and dressed as if he was about to go out. His hat and stick lay on the sofa. I fancied, as I came in, that he was standing in the middle of the room, his legs straddled, his head bowed, saying something aloud to himself. But as soon as he saw me, he rushed to me all but with a shout, so that I involuntarily drew back and was about to run away; but he seized me by both hands and pulled me to the sofa; he sat down on the sofa himself, seated me directly opposite him in an armchair, and, without letting go of my hands, with trembling lips, with tears suddenly glistening on his eyelashes, said to me in a pleading voice:

"Alexei Ivanovich, save me, save me, spare me!"

For a long time I could understand nothing; he kept talking, talking, talking, and kept repeating: "Spare me, spare me!" I finally realized that he expected something like advice from me; or, better to say, abandoned by everybody, anguished and anxious, he had remembered me and summoned me in order to talk, talk, talk.

He had gone crazy, or at any rate was bewildered in the highest degree. He clasped his hands and was ready to throw himself on his knees before me to persuade me to—what do you think?—to go at once to Mlle Blanche and beg her, exhort her to return to him and marry him.

"For pity's sake, General," I cried, "it may well be that Mlle Blanche hasn't noticed me up to now! What can I do?"

But it was useless to object: he didn't understand what was said to him. He began talking about grandmother as well, only it was terribly incoherent; he still stood by the notion of sending for the police.

"With us, with us," he began, suddenly boiling over with indignation, "in short, with us, in our well-organized state, where authorities do exist, such old women would immediately be taken into custody! Yes, my dear sir, yes," he went on, suddenly lapsing into a scolding tone, jumping up and pacing the room, "you still don't know that, my dear sir," he turned to some imaginary dear sir in the corner, "so now you'll learn...yes, sir...with us such old women get tied in a knot, yes, a knot, a knot, sir...oh, devil take it!"

And he threw himself down on the sofa again, but a minute later, all but spluttering, breathless, he hastened to tell me that Mlle Blanche wouldn't marry him because grandmother had come instead of a telegram, and it was now clear that he would get no inheritance. He thought I still didn't know any of it. I tried to mention des Grieux; he waved his hand: "Gone! Everything I own is mortgaged to him; I'm naked as a worm! That money you brought...that money—I don't know how much is left, I think about seven hundred francs, and—enough, sir, that's it, and beyond that I don't know, I don't know, sir!..."

"How are you going to pay for the hotel?" I cried in alarm, "and...then what?"

He glanced around pensively, but didn't seem to understand, and maybe hadn't even heard me. I tried to start talking about Polina Alexandrovna, about the children; he hurriedly answered, "Yes! yes!" but at once began talking about the prince again, about the fact that Blanche was now going off with him, and then..."and then...what am I to do, Alexei Ivanovich?" he suddenly turned to me. "I swear to God! What am I to do?—tell me, that's really ungrateful! isn't it ungrateful?"

Finally, he dissolved in a flood of tears.

There was nothing to be done with a man like that; to leave him alone was also dangerous; something might happen to him. However, I somehow got rid of him, but gave the nanny to know that she should look in on him often, and besides that I told the floorboy, a very sensible fellow, who for his part also promised me to keep an eye on him.

I no sooner left the general than Potapych came to me with a summons from grandmother. It was eight o'clock, and she had just come back from the vauxhall after losing definitively. I went to her: the old woman was sitting in her chair, totally exhausted, and evidently sick. Marfa served her a cup of tea, which she almost forced her to drink. Grandmother's voice and tone were markedly changed.

"Good evening, dearest Alexei Ivanovich," she said, inclining her head slowly and gravely, "forgive me for troubling you once

more, forgive an old woman. I, my dear, left everything there, nearly a hundred thousand roubles. You were right not to go with me yesterday. I have no money now, not a penny. I don't want to delay for a moment, I'll leave at half-past nine. I've sent to that Englishman of yours, Astley or whatever, and want to borrow three thousand francs from him for a week. You persuade him, so he doesn't get some notion and say no. I'm still quite rich, my dear. I have three estates and two houses. And some money can be found, I didn't take it all with me. I say it so that he won't have doubts of some sort...Ah, here he is! You can tell a good man when you see one."

Mr. Astley came hurrying at grandmother's first summons. Without much reflection or talk, he at once counted out three thousand francs against a promissory note which grandmother proceeded to sign. The business concluded, he bowed and hurriedly left.

"And now you go, too, Alexei Ivanovich. There's a little more than an hour left—I want to lie down, my bones ache. Don't judge me too harshly, fool that I am. Now I'll never accuse young people of light-mindedness, and it would also be a sin now for me to accuse that unfortunate fellow, that general of yours. Even so I won't give him any money, as he wants, because in my opinion he's as foolish as they come, though I'm no smarter than he is, old fool that I am. Truly, God judges old age as well and punishes pride. Well, good-bye. Marfusha, lift me up."

I wished to see grandmother off, however. Besides, I was in some sort of expectation, I kept expecting that something was about to happen. I couldn't sit in my room. I went out to the corridor several times, even went out for a moment to wander in the avenue. My letter to her had been clear and decisive, and the present catastrophe was, of course, definitive. In the hotel I heard of des Grieux's departure. Finally, if she rejects me as a friend, maybe she won't reject me as a servant. She does need me, at any rate to run errands; I'll be useful, it can't be otherwise!

By train time I ran to the station and got grandmother seated. They all settled in a special family car. "Thank you, dearie, for your disinterested concern," she said at parting, "and tell Praskovya what I said to her yesterday—I'll be waiting for her."

I went home. Passing by the general's suite, I met the nanny and inquired about the general. "Him, dearie? He's all right," she answered glumly. I stepped in anyhow, but in the doorway to the study I stopped in decided amazement. Mlle Blanche and the general were laughing their heads off over something. *La veuve Cominges* was sitting right there on the sofa. The general was obviously out of his wits with joy, babbled all sorts of nonsense, and kept dissolving in long, nervous laughter, which made his face crease into a countless number of wrinkles and his eyes disappear somewhere. Later I learned from Blanche herself that, having chased the prince away and learning of the general's weeping, she decided to comfort him and stopped to see him for a moment. But the poor general didn't know then that his fate had been decided and Blanche had already started packing in order to fly off to Paris on the first morning train.

Having paused on the threshold of the general's study, I decided not to go in and went away unnoticed. Going up to my room and opening the door, I suddenly noticed some figure in the semidarkness, sitting on a chair in the corner by the window. It didn't get up when I appeared. I quickly approached, looked, and—my breath was taken away: it was Polina!

CHAPTER XIV

I CRIED OUT.

"What is it? What is it?" she asked strangely. She was pale and looked gloomy.

"What do you mean, what? You? here, in my room?"

"If I come, I come *entirely*. That's my way. You'll see it presently; light a candle."

I lit a candle. She stood up, went to the table, and placed an unsealed letter before me.

"Read it," she ordered.

"This—this is des Grieux's hand!" I cried, snatching the letter. My hands shook, and the lines leaped before my eyes. I've forgotten the exact terms of the letter, but here it is, if not word for word, at least thought for thought.

Mademoiselle [wrote des Grieux], unfortunate circumstances have forced me to leave immediately. You, of course, noticed yourself that I deliberately avoided a final talk with you until all the circumstances had been clarified. The arrival of your old relative [*de la vieille dame*] and her preposterous action put an end to all my perplexities. My own unsettled affairs forbid me definitively to nourish any further the sweet hopes in which I allowed myself to revel for some time. I regret the past, but I hope you will find nothing in my behavior unworthy of a gentleman and an honest man [*gentilhomme et honnête homme*]. Having lost almost all my money in loans to your stepfather, I find myself in extreme necessity of making use of what remains to me: I have already told my friends in Petersburg to make immediate arrangements for the sale of the property mortgaged to me; knowing, however, that your light-minded stepfather has squandered your own money, I have decided to forgive him fifty thousand francs, and I am returning to him part of the mortgage papers in that sum, so that it is now possible for you to regain everything you have lost by suing him for your property through the courts. I hope, *mademoiselle*, that in the present state of affairs my action will prove quite profitable for you. I hope also that by acting thus I am fully fulfilling the obligations of an honest and noble man. Rest assured that the memory of you is forever imprinted on my heart.

"Well, it's all clear," I said, turning to Polina, "not that you could have expected anything else," I added indignantly.

"I wasn't expecting anything," she replied with apparent calm, but something seemed to tremble in her voice. "I resolved everything long ago; I read his mind and knew what he thought. He thought that I was seeking...that I'd insist..." She stopped and, without finishing, bit her lip and fell silent. "I purposely doubled my contempt for him," she began again, "I waited for what he would do. If the telegram about the inheritance had come, I would have flung my idiot stepfather's debt at him and chased him away! He's been hateful to me for a long, long time. Oh, this was not the man of before, a thousand times not, and now, and now!...Oh, what happiness it would be now to fling that fifty thousand in his mean face, and spit...and smear it around!"

"But the paper—that mortgage for fifty thousand he returned—isn't it with the general? Take it and give it to des Grieux."

"Oh, that's not it! That's not it!"

"Yes, true, that's not it! And what use is the general now? But what about grandmother?" I cried suddenly.

Polina looked at me somehow distractedly and impatiently.

"Why grandmother?" Polina said with vexation. "I can't go to her...And I don't want to ask anyone's forgiveness," she added irritably.

"What's to be done, then?" I cried. "And how, how could you love des Grieux! Oh, the scoundrel, the scoundrel! Well, if you like, I'll kill him in a duel! Where is he now?"

"He's in Frankfurt and will be there for three days."

"One word from you, and I'll go tomorrow by the first train," I said in some sort of stupid enthusiasm.

She laughed.

"Why, he might just say: first return the fifty thousand francs. And why would he fight?...What nonsense!"

"But where, then, where can we get these fifty thousand francs?" I repeated, grinding my teeth, as if one could just suddenly pick them up off the floor. "Listen: Mr. Astley?" I asked, turning to her with the beginnings of some strange idea.

Her eyes flashed.

"What, do *you yourself* really want me to leave you for that Englishman?" she said, looking into my face with piercing eyes and smiling bitterly. It was the first time in my life she had spoken so intimately.

It seems at that moment her head began spinning from agitation, and she suddenly sat down on the sofa as if in exhaustion.

It was like being struck by lightning: I stood there and couldn't believe my eyes, couldn't believe my ears! So it meant she loved me! She came *to me*, not to Mr. Astley! She, alone, a young girl, came to my room, in a hotel—meaning she had compromised herself publicly—and I stand before her and still don't understand!

A wild thought flashed in my head.

"Polina! Give me just one hour! Wait here for only one hour and...I'll come back! It's...it's necessary! You'll see! Stay here, stay here!"

And I ran out of the room without responding to her astonished, questioning look; she called out something after me, but I didn't go back.

Yes, sometimes the wildest thought, the seemingly most impossible thought, gets so firmly settled in your head that you finally take

it for something feasible...Moreover, if the idea is combined with a strong, passionate desire, you might one day take it, finally, for something fatal, inevitable, predestined, for something that can no longer not be and not happen! Maybe there's also something else, some combination of presentiments, some extraordinary effort of will, a self-intoxication by your own fantasy, or whatever else—I don't know; but on that evening (which I will never forget as long as I live) a miraculous event took place. Though it is perfectly justified arithmetically, nonetheless for me it is still miraculous. And why, why did this certainty lodge itself so deeply and firmly in me then, and now so long ago? I surely must have thought of it, I repeat to you, not as an event that might happen among others (and therefore also might not happen), but as something that simply could not fail to happen!

It was a quarter-past ten; I entered the vauxhall in such firm hopes and at the same time in such excitement as I had never experienced before. There were still enough people in the gaming rooms, though twice less than in the morning.

After ten o'clock, those left around the gaming tables are the real, desperate gamblers, for whom nothing exists at the spa except roulette, who come for the sake of it alone, who give poor notice to what happens around them, and are interested in nothing else during the whole season, but only play from morning till night, and would be ready, perhaps, to play all night till dawn, if it were possible. And they always go away grudgingly when the roulette closes at midnight. And when, around midnight, before closing the roulette, the head croupier announces: "*Les trois derniers coups, messieurs!*" ¹⁵⁵ they are sometimes ready to gamble away all they have in their pockets on these last three rounds—and it's actually here that they lose the most. I went to the same table where grandmother had sat earlier. It wasn't very crowded, so that I very quickly found a place to stand at the table. Right in front of me on the green baize, the word *Passe* was written. *Passe* is the series of numbers from nineteen to thirty-six inclusive. The first series, from one to eighteen inclusive, is called *Manque*; but what business was that of mine? I didn't calculate, I didn't even hear what number had come up on the last round, and I didn't ask about it as I began to play—as any slightly calculating gambler would have done. I took out all my twenty friedrichs d'or and threw them on the *passe* that lay in front of me.

"*Vingt-deux!*" ¹⁵⁶ cried the croupier.

I won—and again staked everything: the previous money and the winnings.

"*Trente-et-un!*" ¹⁵⁷ cried the croupier. I won again! That meant I had eighty friedrichs d'or in all! I pushed all eighty onto the twelve middle numbers (triple the winnings, but the chances are two to one against you), the wheel spun, and twenty-four came up. They handed me three rolls of fifty friedrichs d'or and ten gold pieces; in all, with the previous money, I wound up with two hundred friedrichs d'or.

I was as if in a fever and pushed this whole pile of money onto red—and suddenly came to my senses! And for the only time that whole evening, in all that playing, fear sent a chill over me and came back as a trembling in my hands and legs. With terror I sensed and instantly realized what it meant for me now to lose! My whole life was at stake!

"*Rouge!*" cried the croupier—and I drew a deep breath, fiery needles pricked me all over. They paid me in banknotes; I therefore had four thousand florins and eighty friedrichs d'or! (I could still follow the reckoning.)

Then, I remember, I staked two thousand florins on the twelve middle numbers again and lost; I staked my gold and eighty friedrichs d'or and lost. Rage came over me: I seized the last remaining two thousand florins and staked them on the twelve first numbers—just so, in case, like that, without calculation! However, there was one moment of expectation, perhaps similar in impression to that experienced by Mme Blanchard, in Paris, as she fell to the ground from a hot-air balloon. ¹³

"*Quatre!*" ¹⁵⁸ cried the croupier. In all, including the former stake, I again had six thousand florins. I had the air of a conqueror, I feared nothing, nothing at all now, and I threw four thousand florins on black. Some nine people, following me, also rushed to stake on black. The croupiers exchanged glances and remarks. There was talk and anticipation around me.

It came up black. Here I no longer remember either my reckoning or the order of my stakes. I only remember, as in a dream, that it seems I won sixteen thousand florins; then, in three unlucky turns, I blew twelve of them; then I pushed the remaining four thousand onto *passe* (but almost feeling nothing as I did it; I only waited somehow mechanically, without thinking)—and won again; then I won four more times in a row. I remember only that I raked in money by the thousands; I also recall that the twelve middle numbers came up most often, and I attached myself to them. They appeared somehow regularly—three, four times in a row without fail—then disappeared a couple of times, then came back again three or four times in a row. This astonishing regularity sometimes occurs in spells—and it's this that throws off the seasoned gamblers, who calculate with a pencil in their hands. And what a terrible mockery of fate sometimes happens here!

I think no more than half an hour had gone by since my arrival. Suddenly the croupier informed me that I had won thirty thousand florins, and since the bank could not answer for more at one time, it meant that the roulette would close till the next morning. I grabbed all my gold, poured it into my pockets, grabbed all the banknotes, and at once moved to another table, in another room, where there was another roulette; a whole crowd flocked after me; a place was cleared for me at once, and I began staking again, anyhow and without calculating. I have no idea what saved me!

Occasionally, however, calculation began to flash in my head. I would latch on to certain numbers and choices, but soon abandoned them and staked again almost unawares. I must have been very distracted; I remember that the croupiers corrected my play several times. I made bad mistakes. My temples were damp with sweat, and my hands shook. Little Poles ran up to me with their services, but I didn't listen to anyone. My luck held out! Suddenly loud talk and laughter arose around me. "Bravo, bravo!" everyone cried, some even clapped their hands. I won thirty thousand florins here as well, breaking the bank, which was closed till the next day!

"Leave, leave," someone's voice whispered to me on my right. It was some Frankfurt Jew; he had been standing next to me all the while and, it seems, had occasionally helped me to play.

"For God's sake, leave," another voice whispered in my left ear. I glanced up fleetingly. It was a quite modestly and decently dressed lady of about thirty, with a sickly pale, weary face, but even now recalling her wonderful former beauty. At that moment I was stuffing my pockets with banknotes, which I just crumpled up, and gathering the gold that was left on the table. Seizing the last roll of fifty friedrichs d'or, I managed, quite unnoticed, to put it into the pale lady's hand; I wanted terribly to do that then, and I remember her slender, thin fingers pressed my hand hard as a sign of warmest gratitude. All this took only a moment.

Having gathered up everything, I quickly went on to the *trente et quarante*.

Trente et quarante is where the aristocratic public sits. It's not roulette, it's cards. Here the bank is answerable for a hundred thousand thalers a time. The biggest stake is also four thousand florins. I was totally ignorant of the game, and among the stakes knew only red and black, which were here as well. I latched on to them. The whole vauxhall crowded around. I don't remember whether I thought even once about Polina during that time. I felt some sort of insuperable pleasure then in grabbing and raking in banknotes, which were heaping up in front of me.

It actually seemed that fate was urging me on. This time, as if on purpose, a certain circumstance occurred, which, however, is repeated rather often in gambling. Luck attaches itself, for instance, to red, and doesn't leave it for ten, even fifteen times in a row. I had heard two days earlier that, a week before, red had come up twenty-two times in a row; no one even remembered such a thing happening at roulette, and it was retold with amazement. Naturally, everyone abandoned red at once, and after ten times, for instance, almost no one dared to stake on it. But no experienced gambler would have staked on black then as opposed to red. An experienced gambler knows what this "whim of chance" means. For instance, it would seem that, after sixteen reds, the seventeenth is bound to be black. Novices fall upon it in crowds, doubling and tripling their stakes, and lose terribly.

But I, by some strange whim, noticing that red had come up seven times in a row, deliberately latched on to it. I'm convinced that it was half vanity; I wanted to astonish the spectators with an insane risk, and—oh, strange feeling—I distinctly remember that suddenly, indeed without any challenge to my vanity, I was overcome by a terrible thirst for risk. Maybe, having gone through so many sensations, my soul was not sated but only exacerbated by them, and demanded more sensations, ever stronger and stronger, to the point of utter exhaustion. And, I'm truly not lying, if the rules of the game had allowed me to stake fifty thousand florins at once, I would certainly have staked them. Around me they cried that it was insane, that red had already come up fourteen times!

"*Monsieur a gagné déjà cent mille florins,*" ⁵⁹ someone's voice said next to me.

I suddenly came to my senses. What? I had won a hundred thousand florins that evening! What did I need more for? I fell upon the banknotes, crumpled them into my pocket without counting, raked up all my gold, all the rolls, and ran out of the vauxhall. Around me everyone laughed as I passed through the rooms, looking at my bulging pockets and my uneven gait owing to the weight of the gold. I think it weighed over seventeen pounds. Several hands reached out to me; I gave money away by the handful, as much as I got hold of. Two Jews stopped me at the exit.

"You're bold! You're very bold!" they said to me. "But leave tomorrow morning without fail, otherwise you'll lose it all..."

I didn't listen to them. The avenue was so dark that I couldn't see my own hand. It was about a quarter of a mile to the hotel. I had never been afraid of thieves or robbers, even when I was little; I didn't think of them now either. However, I don't remember what I thought about on the way; there were no thoughts. My only sensation was of some terrible pleasure—luck, victory, power—I don't know how to express it. The image of Polina flashed before me as well; I remembered and was conscious that I was going to her, that I would presently be together with her and would be telling her, showing her...but I barely remembered what she had said to me earlier, and why I had gone, and all those recent sensations, which had been there an hour and a half ago, now seemed to me something long past, corrected, outdated—of which we would make no further mention, because now everything would start anew. Almost at the end of the avenue fear suddenly came upon me: "What if I'm murdered and robbed right now!" With each step, my fear redoubled. I nearly ran. Suddenly at the end of the avenue our hotel shone all at once, lit up by countless lights—thank God: home!

I ran up to my floor and quickly opened the door. Polina was there, sitting on my sofa in front of a lighted candle, her arms crossed. She looked at me in amazement, and I certainly was a strange sight at that moment. I stopped before her and began flinging my whole pile of money on the table.

CHAPTER XV

I REMEMBER SHE LOOKED terribly intently into my face, but without moving, without even changing her position.

"I won two hundred thousand francs," I cried, flinging down my last roll. The enormous pile of banknotes and rolls of gold covered the whole table, and I couldn't take my eyes off it; at moments I completely forgot about Polina. Now I'd begin putting all those heaps of banknotes in order, stacking them together, now I'd gather the gold into one common heap; then I'd abandon it all and begin pacing the room in quick strides, lapsing into thought; then I'd suddenly go up to the table and begin counting the money again. Suddenly, as if coming to my senses, I rushed to the door and quickly locked it, turning the key twice. Then I stopped, pondering, before my little suitcase.

"Shouldn't I put it in the suitcase till tomorrow?" I asked, suddenly turning to Polina, and I suddenly remembered about her. She went on sitting without stirring, in the same place, but was watching me intently. The expression on her face was somehow strange; I didn't like that expression! I wouldn't be mistaken if I said there was hatred in it.

I quickly went over to her.

"Polina, here's twenty-five thousand florins—that's fifty thousand francs, even more. Take it, fling it in his face tomorrow."

She didn't answer me.

"If you like, I'll take it myself, early in the morning. Shall I?"

She suddenly began to laugh. She laughed for a long time.

I looked at her with astonishment and sorrowful feeling. This laughter was very much like her recent, frequent, mocking laughter at me, which always came at the time of my most passionate declarations. Finally, she stopped and frowned; she looked me over sternly from under her eyebrows.

"I won't take your money," she said contemptuously.

"How's that? What's wrong?" I cried. "Why, Polina?"

"I don't take money for nothing."

"I'm offering it to you as a friend; I'm offering you my life."

She looked at me with a long, searching gaze, as if she wanted to pierce me through.

"You're paying too much," she said, smiling, "des Grieux's mistress isn't worth fifty thousand francs."

"Polina, how can you speak to me like that!" I cried in reproach. "Am I des Grieux?"

"I hate you! Yes...yes!...I dislike you more than des Grieux," she cried, suddenly flashing her eyes.

Here she suddenly covered her face with her hands and went into hysterics. I rushed to her.

I realized that something had happened to her in my absence. It was as if she was not at all in her right mind.

"Buy me! You want to? you want to? for fifty thousand francs, like des Grieux?" she burst out with convulsive sobs. I embraced her, kissed her hands, her feet, fell on my knees before her.

Her hysterics were passing. She put both hands on my shoulders and studied me intently. It seemed as if she wanted to read something in my face. She listened to me, but apparently without hearing what I said to her. Some sort of care and pensiveness appeared in her face. I feared for her; it decidedly seemed to me that her mind was becoming deranged. She would suddenly begin to draw me gently to her; a trustful smile would wander over her face; then she would suddenly push me away, and again start peering at me with a darkened look.

Suddenly she rushed to embrace me.

"You do love me, don't you?" she said. "Why, you wanted...you wanted to fight with the baron over me!" And she suddenly burst out laughing—as if something funny and dear had suddenly flashed in her memory. She wept and laughed at the same time. Well, what was I to do? I was as if in a fever myself. I remember she began saying something to me, but I could understand almost nothing. It was some kind of raving, some kind of prattle—as if she wanted to tell me something quickly—raving interrupted now and then by the merriest laughter, which began to frighten me. "No, no, you're a dear, a dear!" she repeated. "You're my faithful one!" and she again put her hands on my shoulders, again peered at me and went on repeating: "You love me...love me...will you love me?" I couldn't take my eyes off her; I had never yet seen her in these fits of tenderness and love; true, it was, of course, raving, but...noticing my passionate look, she would suddenly begin to smile slyly; for no reason at all she would start talking about Mr. Astley.

However, she mentioned Mr. Astley constantly (especially earlier, when she had tried to tell me something), but precisely what it was, I couldn't grasp; it seemed she even laughed at him; she constantly repeated that he was waiting...and did I know that he was certainly standing under the window now? "Yes, yes, under the window—well, open it, look, look, he's here, here!" She pushed me towards the window, but as soon as I made as if to go to it, she dissolved in laughter, and I stayed by her, and she rushed to embrace me.

"So we're leaving? Aren't we leaving tomorrow?" suddenly came anxiously to her head. "Well..."(and she fell to thinking), "well, will we catch up with grandmother, do you think? In Berlin, I think, we'll catch up with her. What do you think she'll say when we catch up with her and she sees us? And Mr. Astley?...Well, that one won't jump off the Schlangenberg, do you think?" (She laughed loudly.) "Well, listen: do you know where he's going next summer? He wants to go to the North Pole for scientific research, and he invited me to go with him, ha, ha, ha! He says that without the Europeans we Russians don't know anything and can't do anything... But he's also kind! You know, he excuses the 'general'; he says that Blanche...that passion—well, I don't know, I don't know," she suddenly repeated as if wandering and at a loss. "Poor things, I'm so sorry for them and for grandmother...No, listen, listen, who are

you to go killing des Grieux? And did you really and truly think you'd kill him? Oh, silly boy! Could you possibly think I'd let you fight with des Grieux? And you wouldn't kill the baron either," she added, suddenly bursting into laughter. "Oh, how ridiculous you were then with the baron; I watched the two of you from my bench; and how reluctant you were to go then, when I sent you. How I laughed then, how I laughed," she added, laughing loudly.

And again she suddenly kissed me and embraced me, again she pressed her face to mine passionately and tenderly. I no longer thought or heard anything. My head was spinning...

I think it was about seven o'clock in the morning when I came to my senses; the sun was shining into the room. Polina was sitting next to me and looking around strangely, as if coming out of some darkness and collecting her memories. She also had only just woken up and gazed intently at the table and the money. My head was heavy and ached. I was about to take Polina's hand; she suddenly pushed me away and jumped up from the sofa. The beginning day was overcast; it had rained before dawn. She went to the window, opened it, thrust out her head and chest, and, propping herself on her hands, her elbows resting on the windowsill, stayed that way for about three minutes, without turning to me or listening to what I was saying to her. With fear it came to my head: what will come now and how will it end? Suddenly she got up from the window, went over to the table, and, looking at me with an expression of boundless hatred, her lips trembling with anger, said to me:

"Well, now give me my fifty thousand francs!"

"Again, again, Polina!" I tried to begin.

"Or have you changed your mind? Ha, ha, ha! Maybe you're sorry now?"

The twenty-five thousand florins, already counted out last night, were lying on the table. I took them and gave them to her.

"So it's mine now? Is it? Is it?" she asked me spitefully, holding the money in her hands.

"But it has always been yours," I said.

"Well, then, here's your fifty thousand francs!" She swung and sent them flying at me. The wad struck me painfully in the face and scattered over the floor. Having done that, Polina ran out of the room.

I know, of course, she was not in her right mind at that moment, though I don't understand this temporary madness. True, even now, a month later, she's still unwell. What, however, was the cause of this condition and, above all, of this escapade? Injured pride? Despair over the fact that she had even ventured to come to me? Did I look to her as if I was glorying in my success and indeed, just like des Grieux, wanted to get rid of her by giving her fifty thousand francs? But that wasn't so, I know it by my own conscience. I think that part of the blame here lay in her vanity: vanity prompted her not to believe me and to insult me, though all this may have presented itself to her quite vaguely. In that case, of course, I answered for des Grieux, and was to blame, maybe, without much blame. True, all this was only delirium; it's also true that I knew she was delirious, and...paid no attention to that circumstance. Maybe now she can't forgive me for it? Yes, but that's now; but then, then? Her delirium and illness were not so strong that she totally forgot what she was doing when she came to me with des Grieux's letter? So she knew what she was doing.

Carelessly, hastily, I stuffed all my paper money and my whole heap of gold into the bed, covered it, and left some ten minutes after Polina. I was sure she had run home, and wanted to get to their suite quietly and ask the nanny in the front room about the young lady's health. What was my amazement when, meeting the nanny on the stairs, I learned that Polina had not returned home yet and that the nanny herself was coming to my room to fetch her.

"Just now," I said to her, "she left me only just now, some ten minutes ago, where could she have gone?"

The nanny looked at me reproachfully.

And meanwhile a whole story had come out, which had already spread through the hotel. In the porter's lodge and at the manager's it was whispered that, at six o'clock in the morning, the *Fräulein* came running out of the hotel, in the rain, and ran off in the direction of the Hôtel d'Angleterre. From their words and hints, I noticed that they already knew she had spent the whole night in my room. However, there was already talk about the general's whole family: it became known that the general had lost his mind the day before and wept for the whole hotel to hear. The talk also was that the grandmother who had come was his mother, who had appeared on purpose from Russia itself to forbid her son to marry Mlle de Cominges, and in case he disobeyed, to deprive him of his inheritance, and since he hadn't obeyed, the countess, before his eyes, had deliberately lost all her money at roulette, so that there was nothing to leave him. "*Diese Russen!*" ⁶⁰ the manager repeated in indignation, shaking his head. Others laughed. The manager was making out the bill. Everybody already knew about my winning; Karl, my floorboy, was the first to congratulate me. But I couldn't be bothered with them. I raced to the Hôtel d'Angleterre.

It was still early; Mr. Astley was not receiving anyone; learning that it was I, he came out to me in the corridor and stood before me, silently aiming his tinny gaze at me, waiting for what I was going to say. I inquired at once about Polina.

"She's ill," Mr. Astley replied, looking at me point-blank as before and not taking his eyes off me.

"So she's really here with you?"

"Oh, yes, with me."

"So, then, you...you intend to keep her with you?"

"Oh, yes, I do."

"Mr. Astley, this will cause a scandal; this is impossible. Besides, she's quite ill; maybe you haven't noticed?"

"Oh, yes, I have, and I've already told you she's ill. If she weren't ill, she wouldn't have spent the night with you."

"So you know that, too?"

"I know that. She was on her way here yesterday, and I would have taken her to my female relation, but since she was ill, she went to you by mistake."

"Imagine that! Well, I congratulate you, Mr. Astley. By the way, you've given me an idea: didn't you spend the whole night standing under the window? Miss Polina kept telling me all night to open the window and see whether you were standing there, and she laughed terribly."

"Really? No, I wasn't standing under the window; but I waited in the corridor and walked about."

"But she needs to be treated, Mr. Astley."

"Oh, yes, I've already sent for a doctor, and if she dies, you will give me an accounting for her death."

I was amazed.

"For pity's sake, Mr. Astley, what is it you want?"

"Is it true that you won two hundred thousand thalers yesterday?"

"Only one hundred thousand florins in all."

"Well, you see! So, then, go to Paris this morning."

"What for?"

"All Russians go to Paris when they have money," Mr. Astley explained in a voice and tone as if he was reading it from a book.

"What will I do in Paris now, in the summer? I love her, Mr. Astley! You know it yourself."

"Really? I'm convinced that you don't. Besides, if you stay here, you're certain to lose everything, and you won't have the money to go to Paris. But good-bye, I'm perfectly convinced that you'll go to Paris today."

"Very well, good-bye, only I won't go to Paris. Think, Mr. Astley, about how it will be for us now. In short, the general...and now what's happen with Miss Polina—why, it will get all over town."

"Yes, all over town. The general, I think, doesn't think about it and couldn't care less. Besides, Miss Polina is fully entitled to live wherever she likes. As for this family, it would be correct to say that this family no longer exists."

I walked along and chuckled at this Englishman's strange certainty that I would go to Paris. "Anyhow he wants to shoot me in a duel," I thought, "if Mlle Polina dies—there's another business!" I swear I felt sorry for Polina, but, strangely, since the moment I touched the gaming table the night before and began to rake in wads of money, it was as if my love moved into the background. I say that now; but at the time I still hadn't noted it all clearly. Can it be that I'm really a gambler, can it be that I indeed...loved Polina so strangely? No, I love her even now, by God! And at that moment, when I left Mr. Astley and walked home, I sincerely suffered and blamed myself. But...but here I got involved in an extremely strange and stupid story.

I was hurrying to the general's when a door suddenly opened near their suite and someone called out to me. It was Mme *la veuve* Cominges, and she called me on Mlle Blanche's orders. I went into Mlle Blanche's suite.

They had a small two-room suite. I could hear the laughter and cries of Mlle Blanche from the bedroom. She was getting up.

"Ah, c'est lui! Viens donc, bête! Is it true that tu as gagné d'or et d'argent? J'aimerais mieux l'or." ^{*61}

"I did win," I answered, laughing.

"How much?"

"A hundred thousand florins."

"Bibi, comme tu es bête. But do come in, I can't hear a thing. Nous ferons bombance, n'est-ce pas?" ^{*62}

I went into her room. She was lying under a pink satin spread, from which her swarthy, healthy, astonishing shoulders protruded—shoulders such as can only be seen in a dream—negligently covered by a batiste nightgown trimmed with the whitest lace, which went wonderfully with her swarthy skin.

"Mon fils, as-tu du coeur?" ^{*63} she cried, seeing me, and laughed loudly. She always laughed very gaily and sometimes even sincerely.

"Tout autre..." ^{*64} I began, paraphrasing Corneille. ¹⁴

"You see, vois tu," she suddenly began chattering, "first, find my stockings, help me into my shoes, and second, si tu n'est pas trop bête, je te prends à Paris. ^{*65} You know, I'm going right now."

"Now?"

"In half an hour."

Indeed, everything was packed. All her suitcases and things were standing ready. Coffee had been served long ago.

"Eh bien! If you want, tu verra Paris. Dis donc qu'est-ce que c'est qu'un outchitel? Tu étais bien bête quand tu étais outchitel. ^{*66} But where are my stockings? So, help me on with them!"

She stuck out a really delightful little foot, swarthy, small, not misshapen, like almost all those little feet that look so cute in shoes. I laughed and began to pull a silk stocking onto it. Mlle Blanche meanwhile sat on the bed and chattered.

"Eh bien, que feras-tu, si je te prends avec? First, je veux cinquante mille francs. You'll give them to me in Frankfurt. Nous allons à Paris; there we'll live together et je te ferais voir des étoiles en plein jour. ^{*67} You'll see women such as you've never seen before. Listen..."

"Wait, so I give you fifty thousand francs, and what am I left with?"

"Et cent cinquante mille francs, you've forgotten, and, on top of that, I agree to live in your apartment for a month, two months, que sais-je! Of course, in two months we'll go through that hundred and fifty thousand francs. You see, je suis bonne enfant and am telling you beforehand, mais tu verras des étoiles." ^{*68}

"What, all in two months?"

"What? So it frightens you? Ah, vil esclave! You don't know that one month of that life is better than your whole existence? One month—et après! ^{*69} Mais tu ne peux comprendre, va! Off with you, you're not worthy of it! Aie, que fais-tu?" ^{*70}

At that moment I was putting a stocking on her other foot, but I couldn't help myself and kissed it. She pulled it back and began flicking me in the face with her toe. Finally, she drove me out altogether.

"Eh bien, mon outchitel, je t'attends, si tu veux; ^{*70} I'm leaving in a quarter of an hour!" she called after me.

Returning home, I was already as if in a whirl. What, then, was it my fault that Mlle Polina had thrown the whole wad in my face and already yesterday had preferred Mr. Astley to me? Some stray banknotes still lay on the floor; I picked them up. At that moment the door opened and the manager himself (who wouldn't even look at me before) came with an invitation: wouldn't I like to move downstairs to an excellent suite in which Count V. had just been staying?

I stood and thought a moment.

"The bill!" I cried. "I'm leaving right now, in ten minutes." "If it's Paris, let it be Paris," I thought to myself, "it must have been

written down at my birth!”

A quarter of an hour later the three of us were indeed sitting in a family compartment: myself, Mlle Blanche, and Mme *la veuve* Cominges. Mlle Blanche laughed loudly, looking at me, to the point of hysterics. *La veuve* Cominges seconded her. I wouldn’t say that I felt very gay. My life was breaking in two, but since the previous day I had become accustomed to staking all I had. Maybe it was really true that the money was too much for me and got me into a whirl. *Peut-être, je ne demandais pas mieux.* ⁴⁷¹ It seemed to me that for a time—but only for a time—the stage set was being changed. “But in a month I’ll be back here, and then...then I’ll still have it out with you, Mr. Astley!” No, as I remember it now, I felt terribly sad then, though I did laugh my head off with that little fool Blanche.

“But what is it to you? How stupid you are! oh, how stupid!” cried Blanche, interrupting her laughter and beginning to scold me seriously. “Well, yes, yes, we’ll go through your two hundred thousand francs, but to make up for it, *mais tu seras heureux, comme un petit roi;* ⁴⁷² I’ll tie your necktie myself and introduce you to Hortense. And when we’ve gone through all our money, you’ll come back here and break the bank again. What did those Jews tell you? It’s boldness above all, and you have it, and you’ll be coming to Paris bringing me money more than once. *Quant à moi, je veux cinquante mille francs de rente et alors...*” ⁴⁷³

“And the general?” I asked her.

“And the general, as you know yourself, goes to fetch me a bouquet every day at this hour. Today I purposely told him to find the rarest flowers. The poor thing will come back, and the bird will have flown. He’ll fly after us, you’ll see. Ha, ha, ha! I’ll be very glad. He’ll be useful to me in Paris; here Mr. Astley will pay for him...”

And so it was that I left for Paris then.

CHAPTER XVI

WHAT SHALL I SAY about Paris? It was all, of course, both delirium and foolery. I lived in Paris for only a little more than three weeks, and in that time my hundred thousand francs were completely finished. I'm speaking of only a hundred thousand; the remaining hundred thousand I gave to Mlle Blanche in straight cash—fifty thousand in Frankfurt, and three days later in Paris I handed her the other fifty thousand francs in a promissory note, for which, however, she took the money from me a week later, "*et les cent mille francs qui nous restent, tu les mangeras avec moi, mon outchitel.*" ^{*74} She always called me *outchitel*. It's hard to imagine anything in the world more calculating, mean, and stingy than the category of beings like Mlle Blanche. But that's with regard to her own money. As for my hundred thousand francs, she later declared to me straight out that she needed it in order to establish herself initially in Paris. "So that now I'm standing on a decent footing once and for all, and it will be a long time before anybody throws me off, so at least I've arranged things," she added. However, I scarcely saw that hundred thousand; she kept the money herself all the while, and my purse, which she visited every day, never held more than a hundred francs, and almost always less.

"What do you need money for?" she said occasionally with a most artless look, and I didn't argue with her. Instead, she decorated her apartment very, very nicely on this money, and later when she moved me to the new place, she said, as she was showing me the rooms: "See what can be done, with calculation and taste, on the scantiest means." This scantiness added up, however, to exactly fifty thousand francs. The other fifty thousand she spent on a carriage and horses, and besides that we threw two balls, that is, two evening parties, to which Hortense, and Lisette, and Cléopâtre came—women remarkable in many, many respects, and even far from bad. At these two parties I was forced to play the utterly stupid role of host, to meet and entertain some rich and extremely dull merchants, impossibly ignorant and shameless army lieutenants of various sorts, and pathetic little authors and magazine midges, who arrived in fashionable tailcoats, straw-colored gloves, and with a vanity and conceit of dimensions inconceivable even in Petersburg—which is saying a lot. They even ventured to make fun of me, but I got drunk on champagne and lay about in the back room. All this was loathsome to me in the highest degree. "*C'est un outchitel,*" Blanche said of me, "*il a gagné deux cent mille francs,*" ^{*75} and without me he wouldn't know how to spend it. And afterwards he'll become an *outchitel* again—does anyone know of a post? We must do something for him." I began resorting to champagne quite often, because I was very sad and extremely bored all the time. I lived in the most bourgeois, in the most mercantile milieu, where every sou was counted and measured out. For the first two weeks, Blanche disliked me very much, I noticed that; true, she got me smartly dressed and tied my necktie every day, but in her heart she sincerely despised me. I didn't pay the slightest attention to that. Bored and despondent, I got into the habit of going to the Château des Fleurs, ¹⁶ where regularly, every evening, I got drunk and practiced the cancan (which they dance most vilely there) and later on even achieved some celebrity in that line. Finally, Blanche got to the bottom of me: she had somehow formed an idea for herself beforehand that during our cohabitation, I would walk behind her with a pencil and paper in my hand and keep an account of how much she spent, how much she stole, how much she was going to spend, and how much more she was going to steal, and, of course, she was sure that we would have battles over every ten francs. To each of my assaults, which she imagined beforehand, she had prepared timely objections; but seeing no assaults from me, at first she herself started to object. Sometimes she would begin very hotly, but seeing that I kept silent—most often lying on the sofa and staring fixedly at the ceiling—she would finally even become astonished. At first she thought I was simply stupid, an *outchitel*, and simply broke off her objections, probably thinking to herself: "He's stupid; there's no point in suggesting anything, if he doesn't understand for himself." She would leave, but about ten minutes later would come back again (this happened during the time of her most furious spending, spending completely beyond our means: for instance, she changed horses and bought a pair for sixteen thousand francs).

"Well, so, Bibi, you're not angry?" she came up to me.

"No-o-o! How bo-o-oring!" I said, moving her away with my hand, but this made her so curious that she at once sat down beside me:

"You see, if I decided to pay so much, it's because they were a good deal. They can be sold again for twenty thousand francs."

"I believe you, I believe you; they're splendid horses; and now you've got a nice turnout; it will be useful; well, and enough."

"So you're not angry?"

"At what? It's smart of you to stock up on a few things you need. It will all be of use later. I see you really have to put yourself on such a footing, otherwise you'll never make a million. Here our hundred thousand francs is only a beginning, a drop in the ocean."

Blanche, who least of all expected such talk from me (instead of shouts and reproaches!), looked as if she'd fallen from the sky.

"So you...so that's how you are! *Mais tu as l'esprit pour comprendre! Sais-tu, mon garçon,*" ^{*76} you're an *outchitel*, but you should have been born a prince! So you're not sorry our money's going so quickly?"

"Who cares, the quicker the better!"

"*Mais...sais-tu...mais dis donc,* are you rich? *Mais sais-tu,* you really despise money too much. *Qu'est-ce que tu feras après, dis donc?*" ^{*77}

"Après, I'll go to Homburg and win another hundred thousand francs."

"*Oui, oui, c'est ça, c'est magnifique!*" ¹⁷⁸ And I know you'll certainly win and bring it all here. *Dis donc,* you'll make it so that I really fall in love with you! *Eh bien,* since that's the way you are, I'll love you all the while and won't be unfaithful even once. You see, all this while, though I didn't love you, *parce que je croyais que tu n'est qu'un outchitel (quelque chose comme un laquais, n'est-ce pas?),* but even so I was faithful to you, *parce que je suis bonne fille.*" ¹⁷⁹

"No, lies! And with Albert, that swarthy little officer—as if I didn't see it last time?"

"Oh, oh, *mais tu es...*"

"No, lies, lies; and what do you think, that I'm angry? I spit on it; *il faut que jeunesse se passe*.⁸⁰ You can't chase him away, if he was there before me and you love him. Only don't give him any money, you hear?"

"So you're not angry about that either? *Mais tu es un vrai philosophe, sais tu? Un vrai philosophe!*" she cried in delight. "*Eh, bien, je t'aimerai, je t'aimerai—tu verras, tu sera content!*"⁸¹

And, indeed, since then it was even as if she really did become attached to me, even in a friendly way, and so we spent our last ten days. The promised "stars" I didn't see; but in some respects she really kept her word. Moreover, she got me acquainted with Hortense, who was even all too remarkable a woman in her own way and in our circle was known as *Thérèse-philosophe*...¹⁷

However, there's no point expanding on it; all this could make up a special story, with a special coloring, which I don't want to put into this story. The thing is that I wished with all my might that it would all be over soon. But our hundred thousand francs lasted, as I've already said, for almost a month—at which I was genuinely surprised: at least eighty thousand of this money Blanche spent buying things for herself, and we lived on no more than twenty thousand francs, and even so it was enough. Blanche, who towards the end was even almost candid with me (at least in certain things she didn't lie to me), confessed that at least the debts she had had to incur wouldn't fall on me. "I didn't give you any bills or promissory notes to sign," she said to me, "because I felt sorry for you; another woman would certainly have done that and packed you off to prison. You see, you see how I've loved you and how kind I am! This damned wedding alone is going to cost me quite a bit!"

We did indeed have a wedding. It took place at the very end of our month, and I suppose the last dregs of my hundred thousand francs went on it; with that the affair ended, that is, with that our month ended, after which I was formally dismissed.

It happened like this: a week after we installed ourselves in Paris, the general came. He came straight to Blanche and from the very first visit all but stayed with us. True, he had his own little apartment somewhere. Blanche greeted him joyfully, with shrieks and loud laughter, and even rushed to embrace him; as things turned out, she herself wouldn't let him go, and he had to follow her everywhere: to the boulevards, and for carriage rides, and to the theater, and to see acquaintances. The general was still fit for this employment; he was rather stately and respectable—almost tall, with dyed side-whiskers and enormous mustaches (he served formerly in the cuirassiers), with a distinguished though somewhat flabby face. His manners were excellent, he wore a tailcoat very smartly. In Paris he started wearing his decorations. With such a man, to stroll down the boulevard was not only possible, but, if one may put it so, even *recommandable*. The kind and muddle-headed general was terribly pleased with it all; he had by no means counted on that when he appeared before us on his arrival in Paris. He appeared then all but trembling with fear; he thought Blanche would start shouting and order him thrown out; and therefore, seeing such a turn of affairs, he went into raptures and spent the whole month in some sort of senselessly rapturous state; and in such a state I left him. I was already here when I learned in detail how, after our sudden departure then from Roulettenburg, that same morning something like a fit came over him. He fell unconscious, and then for a whole week was almost like a crazy man and talked nonsense. He was treated, but he suddenly dropped everything, got on the train, and showed up in Paris. Naturally, Blanche's reception of him proved the best medicine; but some signs of illness remained long afterwards, despite his joyful and rapturous state. He was completely unable to reason or even merely conduct any sort of slightly serious conversation; on such occasions he merely added a "Hm!" to every word spoken and nodded his head—and he got off with that. He often laughed, but it was some sort of nervous, morbid laughter, as if he was going into a fit; other times he would sit for whole hours as gloomy as night, knitting his bushy eyebrows. Many things he even didn't remember at all; he became outrageously absentminded and adopted the habit of talking to himself. Only Blanche could revive him; and the fits of a gloomy, sullen state, when he hid in the corner, meant only that he hadn't seen Blanche for a long time, or that Blanche had gone somewhere and hadn't taken him with her, or hadn't been nice to him as she was leaving. Yet he himself couldn't say what he wanted and didn't know he was gloomy and sad. Having sat for an hour or two (I noticed it twice when Blanche left for the whole day, probably to see Albert), he would suddenly start looking around, fussing, glancing over his shoulder, recalling, and seemed as if he wanted to find someone; but seeing no one and just not recalling what he wanted to ask, he would again lapse into oblivion, until Blanche suddenly appeared, gay, frolicsome, dressed up, with her loud, ringing laughter. She would run to him, start pulling at him, and even kiss him—a favor, however, that she rarely bestowed on him. Once the general was so glad to see her that he even burst into tears—I even marveled at him.

As soon as he appeared at our place, Blanche at once began acting as his advocate before me. She even waxed eloquent. She reminded me that she had been unfaithful to the general because of me, that she had almost been his fiancée, had given him her word; that because of her he had abandoned his family, and that, finally, I worked for him and should be sensible of that, and—shame on me...I kept silent, and she rattled on terribly. Finally, I burst out laughing, and the matter ended there, that is, at first she thought I was a fool, but towards the end she arrived at the notion that I was a very good and agreeable man. In short, I had the luck, towards the end, decidedly to earn the full good favor of this worthy girl. (However, Blanche was in fact a most kind girl—only in her own way, of course; I didn't appreciate her at first.) "You're an intelligent and kind man," she used to say to me towards the end, "and...and...it's too bad you're such a fool! You'll never, never be rich!"

"*Un vrai russe, un calmouk*"^{82 18}—several times she sent me out to walk the general, just like a lackey with her greyhound. However, I also took him to the theater, and to the Bal Mabille,¹⁹ and to restaurants. For this Blanche even supplied money, though the general had his own, and he liked very much to take out his wallet in front of people. Once I was almost obliged to use force to keep him from paying seven hundred francs for a brooch he had become enamored of in the Palais Royal²⁰ and wanted at all costs to give to Blanche. Well, what did she need a seven-hundred-franc brooch for? The general had no more than a thousand francs in all. I could never find out where he got it from. I suppose it was from Mr. Astley, the more so as he had paid their hotel bill. As for the way the general looked at me all the while, it seems to me that he never even suspected my relations with Blanche. Though he had heard somehow vaguely that I had won a fortune, he probably supposed I was some sort of private secretary to Blanche, or maybe even a servant. At any rate he always spoke to me condescendingly, as before, like a superior, and occasionally even began to upbraid me. Once he made Blanche and me laugh terribly, at our place, over morning coffee. He was not at all quick to take offense; but here he

suddenly took offense at me—for what, I still don't understand. But, of course, he didn't understand himself. In short, he started talking without beginning or end, *à batons rompus*,⁸³ shouted that I was a mere boy, that he would teach me...that he would make me understand...and so on, and so forth. But no one could understand anything. Blanche rocked with laughter; finally we somehow managed to calm him down and took him for a walk. I noticed many times, however, that he felt sad, was sorry for someone or something, missed someone, even despite Blanche's presence. In those moments, he started talking with me himself a couple of times, but never could explain anything sensibly, recalled his service, his late wife, his management, his estate. He would latch on to some word—and rejoice, and repeat it a hundred times a day, though it didn't express his feelings or his thoughts at all. I tried to speak with him about his children; but he would get off with his former patter and quickly pass on to another subject: "Yes, yes! the children, the children, you're right, the children!" Only once did he wax emotional—he and I were going to the theater: "They're unfortunate children," he suddenly began, "yes, sir, yes, they're un-for-tunate children!" And several times later that evening he repeated the words: "Unfortunate children!" When I began talking once about Polina, he even flew into a rage. "She's an ungrateful woman," he exclaimed, "she's wicked and ungrateful! She has disgraced our family! If we had laws here, I'd have tied her in knots! Yes, sir, yes, sir!" As far as des Grieux was concerned, he couldn't even hear his name. "He has ruined me," he said, "he has robbed me, he has killed me! He was my nightmare for two whole years! For whole months in a row I saw him in my dreams! He...he...Oh, never speak to me of him!"

I saw that things were coming along between them, but kept silent as usual. Blanche was the first to announce it to me: this was exactly a week before we parted. "*Il a de la chance*,"⁸⁴ she rattled out to me, "*babouchka* is really sick now and will certainly die. Mr. Astley sent a telegram. You must admit that he is her heir after all. And even if he's not, he won't hinder anything. First, he has his pension, and second, he'll live in the side room and be perfectly happy. I'll be '*madame la générale*.' I'll get into a good circle" (Blanche constantly dreamed of that), "later on I'll become a Russian landowner, *j'aurai un château, des moujiks, et puis j'aurai toujours mon million*."⁸⁵

"Well, but if he begins to get jealous, demands...God knows what—you understand?"

"Oh, no, *non, non, non!* he won't dare! I've taken measures, don't worry. I've already made him sign several promissory notes in Albert's name. One slip—and he'll be punished at once; but he won't dare!"

"Well, so marry him..."

The wedding was quiet and familial, with no great pomp. Among those invited were Albert and a few close acquaintances. Hortense, Cléopâtre, and the rest were decidedly excluded. The groom was exceedingly concerned with his position. Blanche herself tied his necktie, pomaded him, and in his tailcoat and white waistcoat he looked *très comme il faut*.

"*Il est pourtant très comme il faut*,"⁸⁶ Blanche herself announced to me, coming out of the general's room, as if the idea that the general was *très comme il faut* struck even her. I entered so little into the details, taking part in it all in the capacity of such a lazy spectator, that I've forgotten much that went on. I only remember that Blanche turned out not to be de Cominges at all, just as her mother was not *la veuve Cominges* at all, but du Placet. Why they were both de Cominges up to then, I don't know. But the general remained pleased with that as well, and liked du Placet even more than de Cominges. The morning of the wedding, already fully dressed, he kept pacing the reception room, repeating to himself with an extremely grave and important air: "Mlle Blanche du Placet! Blanche du Placet! Du Placet! Miss Blanca du Placet!..." And a certain self-satisfaction shone in his face. In church, at the mayor's, and at home over the hors d'oeuvres, he was not only joyful and content, but even proud. Something happened with the two of them. Blanche also acquired an air of some special dignity.

"I must behave quite differently now," she said to me with extreme seriousness, "*mais vois-tu*, I haven't thought about this one nasty thing: imagine, I still can't learn my new last name: Zagoryansky, Zagoziansky, *madame la générale de Sago-Sago, ces diables des noms russe, enfin madame la générale à quatorze consonnes! Comme c'est agréable, n'est-ce pas?*"⁸⁷

Finally we parted, and Blanche, that silly Blanche, even became tearful, saying good-bye to me. "*Tu étais bon enfant*," she said, snuffling. "*Je te croyais bête et tu en avais l'air*,"⁸⁸ but it suits you." And, already pressing my hand for the last time, she suddenly exclaimed: "*Attends!* ", rushed to her boudoir and a moment later brought me out two thousand-franc banknotes. I would never have believed it! "This may come in handy. You may be a very learned *outchitel*, but you're a very stupid man. I won't give you more than two thousand, because you'll gamble it away in any case. Well, good-bye! *Nous serons toujours bons amis*, and if you win again, be sure to come to me, *et tu seras heureux!* "⁸⁹

I still have about five hundred francs left; besides, I have a magnificent watch worth a thousand francs, diamond cuff links and the like, so I may still last a rather long time without worrying about anything. I've purposely lodged myself in this little town in order to pull myself together, but I'm mainly waiting for Mr. Astley. I've learned for certain that he'll be passing through and will stop here for a day on business. I'll find out about everything...and then—then go straight to Homburg. I won't go to Roulettenburg, or not until next year. Indeed, they say it bodes ill to try your luck twice in a row at one and the same table, and Homburg is also where the real gambling is.

CHAPTER XVII

IT'S A YEAR AND eight months since I've looked at these notes, and only now, out of anguish and grief, has it occurred to me to divert myself and by chance read through them. So I left off then on the point of going to Homburg. God! with what a—comparatively speaking—light heart I wrote those last lines then! That is, not really with a light heart—but with what self-assurance, with what unshakable hopes! Did I at least have some doubts of myself? And here over a year and a half has gone by, and in my opinion I'm much worse than a beggar! What's a beggar! Spit on beggary! I've simply ruined myself! However, there's hardly anything that compares to it, and there's no point in reading moral lessons to myself! Nothing could be more absurd than moral lessons at such a moment! Oh, self-satisfied people: with what proud self-satisfaction such babblers are ready to utter their pronouncements! If they only knew to what degree I myself understand all the loathsomeness of my present condition, they wouldn't have the heart to teach me. Well, what, what new thing can they say to me that I don't know myself? And is that the point? The point here is that—one turn of the wheel, and everything changes, and these same moralizers will be the first (I'm sure of it) to come with friendly jokes to congratulate me. And they won't all turn away from me as they do now. Spit on them all! What am I now? *Zéro*. What may I be tomorrow? Tomorrow I may rise from the dead and begin to live anew! I may find the man in me before he's lost!

I actually went to Homburg then, but...later I was in Roulettenburg again, I was in Spa as well, I was even in Baden, where I went as the valet of the councillor Hintze, a scoundrel and my former master here. Yes, I was also a lackey, for five whole months! That happened right after prison. (I got to prison in Roulettenburg for a debt I incurred here. An unknown person bought me out—who was it? Mr. Astley? Polina? I don't know, but the debt was paid, two hundred thalers in all, and I was released.) Where was I to go? I went to work for this Hintze. He's a young and flighty man, likes to be lazy, and I can speak and write in three languages. I began working for him as some sort of secretary, for thirty guldens a month; but I ended in real lackeydom with him: he didn't have the means to keep a secretary, and he lowered my salary; since I had nowhere to go, I stayed—and thus turned myself into a lackey. I ate little and drank little while with him, and that way I saved seventy guldens in five months. One evening in Baden, I announced to him that I wished to part with him; that same evening I went to play roulette. Oh, how my heart throbbed! No, it wasn't money that was dear to me! My only wish then was that the next day all those Hintzes, all those hotel managers, all those magnificent Baden ladies—that they would all be talking about me, telling my story, astonished at me, praising me, and bowing before my new winnings. That was all childish dreams and concerns, but...who knows, maybe I'd meet Polina, too, and tell her, and she'd see that I was above all these absurd jolts of fate...Oh, it's not money that's dear to me! I'm sure I would have frittered it all away on some Blanche again and driven around Paris for three weeks with my own pair of horses worth sixteen thousand francs. I know for certain that I'm not stingy: I even think I'm a spendthrift—and yet, even so, with what trepidation, with what a sinking heart I listen to the cry of the croupier: *trente-et-un, rouge, impaire et passe, or quatre, noir, pair et manque*! With what greed I look at the gaming table, scattered with louis d'or, friedrichs d'or, and thalers, at the stacks of gold, when the croupier's rake breaks it up into piles, burning like fire, or the two-foot stacks of silver lying around the wheel. Already as I approach the gaming room, from two rooms away, the moment I hear the clink of spilling money—I almost go into convulsions.

Oh, that evening when I carried my seventy guldens to the gaming table was also remarkable. I began with ten guldens, and again with *passe*. I have a prejudice for *passe*. I lost. I was left with sixty guldens in silver coins; I pondered—and chose *zéro*. I began staking five guldens a time on *zéro*; at the third stake *zéro* suddenly came up, I nearly died of joy, receiving a hundred and seventy-five guldens; when I won a hundred thousand guldens, I wasn't that glad. I at once put a hundred guldens on *rouge*—it won; all two hundred on *rouge*—it won; all four hundred on *noir*—it won; all eight hundred on *manque*—it won; counting what I'd had before, it came to one thousand seven hundred guldens, and that in less than five minutes! But in such moments you forget all your previous failures! For I had obtained it at the risk of more than life, I had dared to risk and—here I was numbered among the human beings again!

I took a room, locked myself in, and sat till three o'clock counting my money. The next morning I woke up a lackey no more. I decided that same day to leave for Homburg: there I had never served as a lackey or sat in prison. Half an hour before the train, I went to make two stakes, no more, and lost fifteen hundred florins. However, I still moved to Homburg, and it's a month now that I've been here...

I live, of course, in constant anxiety, play for the smallest stakes, and am waiting for something, I calculate, I stand for whole days at the gaming table and *watch* the play, I even dream about it, but for all that it seems to me that I've turned to wood, gotten stuck in some mire. I conclude that from the impression of my meeting with Mr. Astley. We hadn't seen each other since that very time, and we met by chance; here's how it was. I was walking in the garden and reckoning that now I was almost out of money, but that I did have fifty guldens—besides, two days before I had paid up fully at the hotel, where I occupied a small room. And so I was left with the possibility of going only once now to play roulette—if I won at least something, I could go on playing; if I lost—I would have to become a lackey again, if I didn't at once find Russians who needed a tutor. Occupied with this thought, I went for my daily walk through the park and through the woods to the neighboring principality. Sometimes I'd spend four hours walking like that and return to Homburg tired and hungry. I had just walked out of the garden into the park, when I suddenly saw Mr. Astley sitting on a bench. He noticed me first and called to me. I sat down beside him. Noticing a certain gravity in him, I at once restrained my gladness; for I had been terribly glad to see him.

"So you're here! I just thought I'd meet you," he said to me. "Don't bother telling me: I know, I know everything; your whole life for the past year and eight months is known to me."

"Hah! see how you keep track of old friends!" I replied. "It's to your credit that you don't forget...Wait, though, that gives me an idea—was it you who bought me out of the Roulettenburg prison, where I was sent for a debt of two hundred guildens? Some unknown person bought me out."

"No, oh, no! I didn't buy you out of the Roulettenburg prison, where you were sent for a debt of two hundred guildens, but I knew you had been sent to prison for a debt of two hundred guildens."

"So all the same you know who bought me out."

"Oh, no, I can't say as I know who bought you out."

"Strange; our Russians don't know me, and the Russians here probably wouldn't buy anyone out; it's there in Russia that Orthodox people buy out their own. So I thought it might have been some odd Englishman, out of eccentricity."

Mr. Astley listened to me with some astonishment. It seems he expected to find me crestfallen and crushed.

"However, I'm very glad to see you have completely preserved all your independence of mind and even your gaiety," he said with a rather unpleasant look.

"That is, you're inwardly gnashing your teeth in vexation because I'm not crushed and humiliated," I said, laughing.

He didn't understand at once, but when he did, he smiled.

"I like your observations. I recognize in those words my former intelligent, rapturous, and at the same time cynical friend. Russians alone are able to combine so many opposites in themselves at one and the same time. Actually, man likes seeing his best friend humiliated before him; friendship is mostly based on humiliation; and that is an old truth known to all intelligent people. But in the present case, I assure you, I am sincerely glad that you are not crestfallen. Tell me, do you intend to give up gambling?"

"Oh, devil take it! I'll give it up at once, as soon as..."

"As soon as you win? So I thought. Don't finish—I know you said it inadvertently, and therefore spoke the truth...Tell me, besides gambling, is there nothing that occupies you?"

"No, nothing..."

He began testing me. I knew nothing, I hardly ever looked at the newspapers, and in all that time I had positively not opened a single book.

"You've turned to wood," he observed, "you've not only renounced life, your own interests and society's, your duty as a citizen and a human being, your friends (all the same you did have them), you've not only renounced any goal whatsoever apart from winning, but you've even renounced your memories. I remember you in an ardent and strong moment of your life; but I'm sure you've forgotten all your best impressions then; your dreams, your most essential desires at present don't go beyond *pair* and *impair*, *rouge*, *noir*, the twelve middle numbers, and so on, and so forth—I'm sure of it!"

"Enough, Mr. Astley, please, please don't remind me," I cried in vexation, all but in anger. "Know that I've forgotten precisely nothing; but I've driven it all out of my head for a time, even the memories—until I've radically improved my circumstances. Then... then you'll see, I'll rise from the dead!"

"You'll still be here ten years from now," he said. "I'll make you a bet that I'll remind you of it, if I live, right here on this bench."

"Well, enough," I interrupted him impatiently, "and to prove to you that I'm not so forgetful of the past, allow me to ask: where is Miss Polina now? If it wasn't you who bought me out, then it must have been her. Since that time I've had no news of her."

"No, oh, no! I don't think she bought you out. She's in Switzerland now, and you will give me great pleasure if you stop asking me about Miss Polina," he said resolutely and even crossly.

"That means she's wounded you badly as well!" I laughed involuntarily.

"Miss Polina is the best being of all beings most worthy of respect, but, I repeat, you will give me great pleasure if you stop asking me about Miss Polina. You never knew her, and I consider her name on your lips an insult to my moral sense."

"So that's how it is! You're wrong, however; and, just think, what else am I to talk to you about except that? That's all our memories consist of. Don't worry, by the way, I don't need any of your innermost secret matters...I'm interested only in Miss Polina's external situation, only in her present external circumstances. That can be said in a couple of words."

"If you please, provided that these couple of words will end it all. Miss Polina was ill for a long time; she's ill now, too. For some time she lived with my mother and sister in the north of England. Six months ago her granny—that same crazy woman, you remember—died and left to her personally a fortune of seven thousand pounds. Now Miss Polina is traveling with the family of my sister, who has since married. Her little brother and sister were also provided for by the granny's inheritance and are studying in London. A month ago the general, her stepfather, died of a stroke in Paris. Mlle Blanche treated him well, but managed to transfer everything he got from the granny to her own name...that, it seems, is all."

"And des Grieux? Isn't he also traveling in Switzerland?"

"No, des Grieux is not traveling in Switzerland, and I don't know where des Grieux is; besides, I warn you once and for all to avoid such hints and ignoble juxtapositions, otherwise you will certainly have to deal with me."

"What! despite our former friendly relations?"

"Yes, despite our former friendly relations."

"A thousand pardons, Mr. Astley. Excuse me, however: there's nothing offensive or ignoble; I don't blame Miss Polina for anything. Besides that, a Frenchman and a Russian young lady, generally speaking—that is such a juxtaposition, Mr. Astley, as neither you nor I can resolve or understand definitively."

"If you will not mention the name of des Grieux together with the other name, I would ask you to explain to me what you mean by the expression 'a Frenchman and a Russian young lady.' What sort of 'juxtaposition' is it? Why precisely a Frenchman and a Russian young lady?"

"You see, you've become interested. But this is lengthy stuff, Mr. Astley. Here you have to know a lot beforehand. However, it's an important question—ridiculous as it all is at first sight. A Frenchman, Mr. Astley, is a finished, beautiful form. You, as a Briton, might disagree with that; I, as a Russian, also disagree—well, let's say, out of envy; but our young ladies may be of a different opinion. You may find Racine ²¹ affected, distorted, and perfumed; you probably wouldn't even bother to read him. I, too, find him affected,

distorted, and perfumed, even ridiculous from a certain point of view; but he's charming, Mr. Astley, and, above all—he's a great poet, whether we like it or not. The national form of the Frenchman, that is, the Parisian, began composing itself into a graceful form while we were still bears. The revolution was heir to the nobility. Nowadays even the most banal little Frenchman may have manners, ways, expressions, and even thoughts of a fully graceful form, without partaking in that form either with his own initiative, or with his soul, or with his heart; he has come into it all by inheritance. In himself he may be emptier than the emptiest and lower than the lowest. Well, Mr. Astley, sir, I shall now inform you that there is no being in the world more trustful and candid than a good, clever, and not too affected Russian young lady. A des Grieux, appearing in some sort of role, appearing masked, can win her heart with extraordinary ease; he is of graceful form, Mr. Astley, and the young lady takes this form for his very soul, for the natural form of his soul and heart, and not for clothing that has come to him through inheritance. To your greatest displeasure, I must confess that Englishmen are for the most part angular and graceless, while Russians have a rather keen ability to discern beauty and to fall for it. But to discern the beauty of a soul and the originality of a person—for that one needs incomparably more independence and freedom than our women, especially young ladies, possess—and in any case more experience. And Miss Polina—forgive me, what's said can't be unsaid—needs a very, very long time to decide that she prefers you to the scoundrel des Grieux. She will appreciate you, will become your friend, will open all her heart to you, but even so in that heart will reign the hateful blackguard, the nasty and petty money-grubber des Grieux. This will even persist, so to speak, out of obstinacy and vanity alone, because the same des Grieux once appeared to her in the aureole of a graceful marquis, a dis-encharmed liberal, who (supposedly!) ruined himself helping her family and the light-minded general. All these tricks were uncovered afterwards. But never mind that they were uncovered: even so, give her the former des Grieux now—that's what she wants! And the more she hates the present des Grieux, the more she pines for the former one, though the former one existed only in her imagination. Are you in sugar, Mr. Astley?"

"Yes, I'm a partner in the well-known sugar refinery Lowell and Co."

"Well, so you see, Mr. Astley. On one side there's a sugar refiner, on the other—the Apollo Belvedere. ²² All this somehow doesn't hang together. And I'm not even a sugar refiner; I'm simply a petty gambler at roulette, and was even a lackey, which is certainly already known to Miss Polina, because she seems to have good police."

"You're bitter, that's why you talk all this nonsense," Mr. Astley said coolly, having pondered. "Besides, there's no originality in your words."

"I agree! But that's the horror of it, my noble friend, that all these accusations of mine, however outdated, however banal, however farcical—are still true! You and I still never got anywhere!"

"That's vile nonsense...because, because...be it known to you!" Mr. Astley pronounced in a trembling voice and flashing his eyes, "be it known to you, ungrateful and unworthy, petty and unhappy man, that I have come to Homburg especially on her orders, so as to see you, have a long and heartfelt talk with you, and report everything to her—your feelings, thoughts, hopes and...memories!"

"It can't be! Can it be?" I cried, and tears gushed from my eyes. I couldn't hold them back, and that, I believe, for the first time in my life.

"Yes, unhappy man, she loved you, and I can reveal it to you, because you're a lost man! What's more, even if I tell you that she loves you to this day—why, you'll stay here all the same! Yes, you've ruined yourself. You had certain abilities, a lively character, and were not a bad man; you could even have been of use to your country, which has such need of people, but—you'll stay here, and your life is ended. I'm not blaming you. In my view, all Russians are that way, or are inclined to be that way. If it's not roulette, it's something else like it. The exceptions are all too rare. You're not the first to have no understanding of what work is (I'm not speaking of your peasants). Roulette is for the most part a Russian game. So far you've been honest and would sooner go to work as a lackey than steal...but I'm afraid to think what the future may hold. Enough, and farewell! You, of course, need money? Here are ten louis d'or for you, I won't give you more, because you'll gamble it away anyway. Take it, and farewell! Take it!"

"No, Mr. Astley, after all that's been said now..."

"Ta-a-ake it!" he cried. "I'm convinced that you are still a noble person, and I'm giving it to you as a friend can give to a true friend. If I could be certain that you would give up gambling right now, leave Homburg, and go to your own country—I would be ready to give you a thousand pounds immediately to start a new career. But I precisely do not give you a thousand pounds, but give you only ten louis d'or, because whether it's a thousand pounds or ten louis d'or at the present time is perfectly one and the same to you; all the same—you'll gamble it away. Take it, and farewell."

"I'll take it, if you'll allow me to embrace you in farewell."

"Oh, with pleasure!"

We embraced sincerely, and Mr. Astley left.

No, he's wrong! If I was sharp and stupid about Polina and des Grieux, he is sharp and hasty about Russians. I'm not talking about myself. However...however, meanwhile that's all not it. It's all words, words, words, and we want deeds! The main thing now is Switzerland! Tomorrow—oh, if only I could set out tomorrow! To be born anew, to resurrect. I must prove to them...Let Polina know that I can still be a human being. All it takes...now it's late, though—but tomorrow...Oh, I have a presentiment, and it cannot be otherwise! I have fifteen louis d'or now, and I began once with only fifteen guildens! If you begin cautiously...—and can I possibly, can I possibly be such a little child? Can I possibly not understand myself that I'm a lost man? But—why can't I resurrect? Yes! It only takes being calculating and patient at least once in your life and—that's all! It only takes being steadfast at least once, and in an hour I can change my whole destiny! The main thing is character. Only remember what happened to me of this sort seven months ago in Roulettenburg, before I lost definitively. Oh, it was a remarkable case of determination: I lost everything then, everything...I walk out of the vauhall, I look—one last gulden is stirring in my waistcoat pocket: "Ah, so I'll have money for dinner!" I thought, but after going a hundred steps, I changed my mind and went back. I staked that gulden on *manque* (that time it was *manque*), and, truly, there's something peculiar in the feeling when, alone, in a foreign land, far from your own country and your friends, and not knowing what you're going to eat that day, you stake your last gulden, your very, very last! I won, and twenty minutes later left the vauhall with a hundred and seventy guildens in my pocket. That's a fact, sirs! There's what your last gulden can sometimes mean! And what if I had lost heart then, what if I hadn't dared to venture? ... Tomorrow, tomorrow it will all be over!